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A Critical Study of the Life and Writings of Sidonie De La Houssaye With Special Emphasis on the Unpublished Works.

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF SIDONIE DE LA HOUSSEY WITH SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS.

Louisiana State University, Ph.D., 1966
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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF
SIDONIE DE LA HOUSSAYE WITH SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Foreign Languages

by
Joseph John Perret
B.A., Tulane University, 1952
M.A.T., Tulane University, 1958
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ABSTRACT

Sidonie de la Houssaye (1820-1894), the Louisiana French writer, spent the greater part of her life in the small town of Franklin about ninety miles west and slightly south of New Orleans. She achieved a regional reputation through conventionally romantic novels, such as Amis et Fortune, Charles et Ella, and Pouponne et Balthazar. A series of four novels (Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans) purporting to be "une étude de mœurs" of the quadroon women of the period 1800-1830, was highly controversial. Her name reached the general American public through George W. Cable, who credited her with three stories in his Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

This study presents the first critical biography of Mme Sidonie de la Houssaye. Heretofore, no documented account of her life existed. Extensive use was made of civil and church records. The author's correspondence with George W. Cable afforded much valuable information whose existence was not even suspected.

Her letters to Cable (only one of his letters to her is extant) enable us to follow closely their unusual literary

relationship and to re-examine Cable's position among the Creoles in the light of new evidence.

Her controversial Quarteronnes are considered in the light of romans de mœurs and found wanting. An extended treatment of the quadroon's position in history and romance precedes the discussion of the novel.

The essential romanticism of Sidonie de la Houssaye is developed throughout the study. Her latent naturalism is demonstrated in the unpublished transitional novels "Claire" and "Frère et soeur." Les Quarteronnes are treated as a logical development of her literary evolution and not as an inexplicable departure from her earlier manner as previously held.

The writer's range and versatility are shown in the genres she embraced: romantic novels, novels of adventure and mystery, semi-naturalistic novels, short stories, and childrens' stories. Her linguistic ability is demonstrated by her command of the Acadian and Negro dialects in addition to standard French.

Sidonie de la Houssaye emerges as one of the finer Louisiana writers and as one of the more versatile writers in any literature.

INTRODUCTION

More than seventy years have elapsed since the death of Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye. As might be expected, time has effaced an image known principally to French-reading citizens of Louisiana. The word reading should be emphasized, because most present-day speakers of the language are completely ignorant of the French literature of their state and have never read any French.

Her contemporaries followed with interest her novels of regional appeal. Amis et fortune, Charles et Ella, and Pouponne et Baltnazar are examples of the regional novel. On the other hand, Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, a series of four novels purporting to be "une étude de mœurs" of the demi-monde, perplexed her readers, who had grown accustomed to her conventional romanticism.

The general public learned of Sidonie de la Houssaye through George Washington Cable. In the "How I Got Them" preface to Strange True Stories of Louisiana, Cable in his cloying, precieux style, threw a sop to his "Creole friend," as he was wont to call her. He was attempting to substantiate

the historicity of "Alix de Morainville," a story of the French Revolution. He stated his reasons for accepting the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript as valid and assured his readers that the original owner of the manuscript believed as he did. This led to a highly contrived passage in which he almost grudgingly gave recognition to our author: "Everything points that way [toward the authenticity of the manuscript], as was suggested at once by Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye--There! I have let slip the name of my Creole friend and can only pray her to forgive me!"¹ No comment will be offered on this passage; it speaks for itself. A chapter, however, will be devoted to the relationship between Cable and Madame de la Houssaye.

Regional appeal and her misunderstood relationship with a controversial writer are not the only justification for this study. Almost thirty years ago, Professor James F. Broussard suggested several reasons for more work on our author. The reasons given are still valid. In an article in L.S.U. Alumni News, he wrote after some general remarks on French Louisiana writers:

However, there is among them a name that has had a special fascination for me . . . because of the conditions under which she wrote, the extremely

¹George W. Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 11.

complicated and complete life which she lived, and her final achievement in literature which have never received the consideration which they merit.²

In the same article, Professor Broussard unknowingly put obstacles in the path of would-be researchers by contributing to the perpetuation of a legend created by her grandchildren. Tinker produced a highly imaginative biography with their help.³ Miss Savoie, who spent considerable time with the grandchildren, painted a picture of a doting grandmother.⁴ The idealized portrait left by Professor Broussard seems heavily influenced by the grandchildren's information and his own admiration for the fifty-five-year-old widow, who on the death of her daughter assumed the care of her eight children:

When later I became acquainted with her granddaughter, who seemed to have remembered her most vividly, she told me that every night, when the duties of the day were done and the children had been put to bed, Madame Sidonie would get into her four-posted bed. There she propped herself against huge pillows and with a lighted candle on each side, she

²James F. Broussard, "Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye," L.S.U. Alumni News, XIII (February, 1937), 5.

³Edward Larocque Tinker, Les Ecris de langue française en Louisiane au XIX^e siècle (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1932), p. 113.

⁴Velma Savoie, "The Life and Writings of Sidonie de la Houssaye" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Romance Languages, Louisiana State University, 1936), passim.

read into the wee hours of the night. The picture is charming.

.
 Again, the granddaughter says that early in the morning when the household got ready for the day's task, they always found their grandmother already up and sitting quietly at her desk, her pen busily running from right to left and filling the pages with the stories she had woven in the quiet of the night. When the breakfast bell rang, Madame would close her book, lock up her desk, and for the rest of the day she was the busy mother and grandmother, attending to the duties of her household, teaching in her private school, attending to civic duties, to charities and in establishing a reputation for usefulness and good works.⁵

Nowhere in these flattering accounts do we find any hint of the grim financial situation that was hers during the last thirty years of her life. No other writer could chronicle her struggle nearly so well as the author herself has done in her correspondence. In her correspondence with Cable in the period 1883-1889, she discussed nearly all her problems. Fortunately, these letters are preserved in the Cable Collection at Tulane University. We shall draw repeatedly from them as this period also represents her peak of literary activity.

What did her contemporaries think of her? Little was known in this area, because of the scarcity of Louisiana French

⁵Broussard, loc. cit., p. 5.

newspapers for the period 1880-1895. With the exception of that of L'Abeille in New Orleans, nothing remotely resembling a complete file exists for any of these newspapers. Thanks to her letters, we have some allusions to contemporary criticism.

In the diary of Dr. Alfred Mercier (1816-1893), which has only recently been edited, we find some astute criticism by the most prolific of the Creole writers.⁶ We also have various pieces of criticism by Professor Alcée Fortier. The French press of Louisiana is represented principally by L. Placide Canonge.⁷

In the course of an extended visit in the United States, the distinguished French critic Auguste Viatte became acquainted with her works. His judgment was categorical: "Mme de la Houssaye mérite plus d'attention."⁸

We heartily concur.

⁶Gloria Nobles Robertson, "The Diaries of Dr. Alfred Mercier: 1879-1893" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Foreign Languages, Louisiana State University, 1947).

⁷Louis Placide Canonge (1822-1893) was a playwright, critic, former director of the French Opera (New Orleans), and editor of L'Abeille, the most influential voice of the French-speaking population in Louisiana.

⁸Auguste Viatte, Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française: des origines à 1950 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1954), p. 294.

The extensive use of the author's correspondence and of civil and church records of the Louisiana parishes was dictated by the very limited bibliography in Louisiana French literature.

This writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of individuals who were generous in devoting their time to various phases of this study.

Mr. V. L. Bedsole, Archivist of the Louisiana State University Library, offered many valuable suggestions. I am indebted to his staff and that of the Louisiana Room under Miss Evangeline Lynch.

Archivists and research librarians at Tulane University and the University of Southwestern Louisiana were very cooperative. Mrs. Griffith at Tulane and Miss Segura at the University of Southwestern Louisiana were especially helpful.

Mother Louise Callan of the Sacred Heart nuns researched the author's convent record and offered precise information on schools of the author's period.

Mrs. Norbert Perret, wife of the author's grandnephew and a resident of Jeanerette, Louisiana, loaned mementos of the author's mother and a photograph of the author.

Miss Sally Kent Phillips of Baton Rouge gave this writer the names of ladies who had personal recollections of

the author.

This writer's father, Dr. J. M. Perret, provided many of the books on Louisiana history and literature.

Finally, he wishes to thank Mrs. L. W. Bromley (née Velma Savoie) for permission to quote from her thesis on Mme de la Houssaye.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Our author was born Hélène Perret on August 17, 1820 in the civil parish of Saint John the Baptist, about thirty-five miles above New Orleans on the Mississippi river. Let it be noted that the name Sidonie did not appear on her baptismal record, which is still in the registry of Saint John the Baptist Church in Edgard, Louisiana. Both Tinker¹ and Caulfeild² give Belle Vue plantation above Franklin on the Irish Bend section of Bayou Tèche as her birthplace. Savoie correctly listed Saint John the Baptist Parish, but gave the date as August 18, 1820.³ We must assume that she was born on the plantation of her father, Ursin Perret. In her fanciful "Une Page de ma vie" she said her father had moved close

¹Tinker, op. cit., p. 108.

²Ruby Van Allen Caulfeild, The French Literature of Louisiana (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 140.

³Savoie, op. cit., p. 1.

to his father-in-law, M. Pain, in the Grande Pointe area.⁴

Grande Pointe, the subject of perhaps the best of George W. Cable's shorter works, is a picturesque area that has remained virtually unchanged since the time of Cable's description. It is something of a curiosity in the agricultural world. Périque tobacco grows only in these few acres, and it can not be successfully transplanted. While this little, triangular plateau on the banks of the Mississippi is not without its archaic charm, it was not the birthplace of the author. Grande Pointe, about fifty-five miles above New Orleans on the river, is in Saint James Parish. (The Mississippi river flows through both St. John the Baptist and St. James parishes. The former starts about thirty-five miles above the city and the latter about forty-eight miles above the city.) There is no evidence to place either the Pains or the Ursin Perrets in this parish. On the other hand, in Saint John the Baptist Parish there is a court record (the last one bearing Ursin Perret's name) that confirms the sale of houses and property on the right bank of the Mississippi in the lower limits of the parish, i.e., the section of the parish most distant from Grande Pointe.⁵

⁴Cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵Court record, St. John the Baptist Parish; October 6, 1828.

Hélène Perret's background is easy to trace. It was that of moderately wealthy sugar planters who had prospered in the rich alluvial country some thirty to forty miles upstream from New Orleans. The first Perret in Louisiana came over in 1723 as a merchant from Grenoble in the Dauphiné district.⁶ Jean Baptiste Perret originally settled with his wife and two children, Alphonse and Marie, in the Baton Rouge area.⁷ Alphonse Perret's son, Pujol, born in 1765, saw service as an officer in the Galvez expedition against the British.⁸ Beginning in the 1770's, we pick up the family closer to New Orleans in Saint Charles and Saint John the Baptist parishes. Pujol Perret married Hélène Bossié by whom he had six children. One of these, Ursin, born in 1797, was the author's father.

On her mother's side it is a little more difficult to trace the family line, but we do know the author's maternal grandparents and great-grandparents. Her mother was Françoise

⁶Stanley Clisby Arthur, Old Families of Louisiana (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1931), p. 365.

⁷"Call for usable material," Bulletin of the Louisiana Genealogical & Historical Society (Baton Rouge), VI (December, 1959), 41.

⁸The Spanish governor Galvez' taking of British posts at Manchac and Baton Rouge was the only action of the Revolution in the state.

Fanie Pain, daughter of François Daniel Pain and Françoise Bossié (Bossier).⁹ The latter is the celebrated "grand'mère" of whom we will hear more. The author called her grandfather "Major" and "Doctor" Pain. No civil record--and there are many bearing his name--gives any title except the sieur of standard judicial phraseology. François Daniel Pain was the son of Daniel Pain and Marie Jeanne Roujot (Rougeau). The spelling of the surname varied, as was not unusual in those days. Françoise Bossié Pain, the grandmother, was the daughter of Pierre Bossié and Magdelaine (Madelenne) Rome (Romel)--both being Gallicized versions of Rommel.¹⁰

The author's maternal great-grandparents both died at her father's home a few years before she was born. In Pierre Bossié's inventory we learn that Mme Bossié died in November, 1813 and Pierre Bossié on February 20, 1817.¹¹

According to the author's version, her maternal grandfather, "Dr." Pain, died about 1826, and Madame Pain called

⁹Her grandmother always signed her name "Bossié." This point will be critical in a later chapter in which we will question the authenticity of some "true" stories.

¹⁰J. Hanno Deiler, The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and the Creoles of German Descent (Philadelphia: Americana Germanica Press, 1909), p. 123.

¹¹Court record, St. John the Baptist Parish; July 8, 1819.

in her son-in-law to manage the estate, which was considerable, though not nearly of the magnitude described by the author. This would seem plausible enough, but the incidents she related, are completely foreign to actuality. There is a germ of truth in them. Our author always has some recognizable fact in evidence when the rest of the story is utterly fantastic. Here the truth is that her grandfather was a wealthy man. The inventory of his estate lists such items as forty-two slaves, homes, etc.¹² In "Chattanooga" she mentioned two hundred and more workers--an increase approaching five hundred per cent.¹³

The wealth is the grain of truth in her account of the events. There is one compelling reason which categorically invalidates the rest of the account. François Daniel Pain was quite dead around 1826. In fact we learn in his inventory that he had died on March 8, 1808. "Le dit sieur François Daniel Pain est décédé dans cette paroisse le huit mars mille huit cent huit, et le six du même mois, et de la même année, il a fait un testament."¹⁴ Another reason, while

¹²Court record, St. John the Baptist Parish; April 8, 1817.

¹³L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 6, p. 36.

¹⁴Court record, St. John the Baptist Parish; April 8, 1817.

lacking some of the cogency of the one just cited, must be considered. Her grandmother had remarried in 1812. In a petition filed by the decedent's husband and attached to the inventory of "la feuè Dame Françoisse Bossié," there is a reference to this second marriage. The petitioner was Alexandre Le Blanc. ". . . in the year 1812 yr petitioner has lawfully married Mde Françoisse Bossier formerly widow Pain."¹⁵ That the Veuve Pain, now Madame Le Blanc, would invite her son-in-law to manage her affairs is unlikely. Her second husband, who outlived her, was in good mental and physical condition.

If we can accept the author's story, this second marriage was received unfavorably by the family. (The author never alluded to it in any of her stories.) She mentioned this marriage to Cable as if it would prove some point. It was irrelevant to his question, but interesting. With good reason Cable asked her if her grandmother was alive in 1836. She replied indignantly that she was indeed alive at that date. The exact date could be furnished on request. This was a bluff that Cable could have called: "Quant à ma grand'mère ... à un âge avancé, elle s'est remariée et, dès ce moment,

¹⁵Court record, St. John the Baptist Parish; March 8, 1828.

une grande froideur a existé entre elle et ses enfants."¹⁶

The "âge avancé" would probably be between forty and forty-five, if we may assume that her first marriage took place in her mid-teens as was customary in her family. As for being alive in 1836--we have seen the succession dated 1828.

She was equally ill-informed about her maternal great-grandfather, Pierre Bossié. She wrote Cable that her mother recalled details of his life: "C'est elle qui m'a dit que Pierre Bossier était de la Flandre française ... elle m'a parlé de son mariage avec Charlotte Blum."¹⁷ The records always refer to Pierre Bossié as a native of Louisiana. His wife was of German extraction, but her name was Madeleine Rome. Had he ever been married to Charlotte Blum, the records would have mentioned it. They are full of references to "époux en premières noces de ____" and "veuve de ____ et épouse de ____ en secondes noces," etc.

As late as 1892, and almost two years after her correspondence with Cable had stopped, she was still looking for information on the Bossié family. Her publisher, a resident of Saint John the Baptist Parish, mentioned genealogical

¹⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1889.

¹⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1887.

information on some Bossier names in a letter dated December 18, 1892.¹⁸ It is clear from the context that she was not familiar with the descendants of Pierre Bossié.

We do not wish to belabor the point. It should be obvious that Madame was inventive and resourceful when genealogy was involved. Inaccurate and willfully deceitful might better characterize her treatment. Ignorance of the facts is excusable; defense of an untenable position is not.

After this setting of the scene, let us state the few facts that we have on the author's early years. The following excerpt comes from the translation of "Une Page de ma vie":

At seven I was placed under a governess. Three other girls made up the number in my class. We lived in a small circle giving our entire time to study, asking nothing of the outside world. My father did all in his power to provide his family with every comfort. My mother's happiness was found with her husband and children. In this environment of love, quiet, books, music, and peace, I lived.¹⁹

The picture is conventional and probably highly colored by the passing of years and a novelist's imagination. Some statements appear exaggerated. The total dedication of a child

¹⁸Letter from Charles Lasseigne to Madame de la Houssaye. Cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁹Cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 13.

of seven is certainly questionable. On the other hand, the living in a world of books is possibly true. Her grandfather Pain had a good collection of the standard classics in Latin, English and French. These books now lie in the attic of the house of her grandnephew (Dr. Norbert Perret) in Jeanerette, Louisiana. I carefully examined them for the author's name, marginalia in her hand, and anything that could connect her with the books. There was nothing. The disposition of her own library remains an enigma. After her death the bulk of it was reputedly given to her son Ludovic (Louis), then residing in New Orleans. His estate then reputedly donated the books to the New Orleans library.²⁰ Neither New Orleans Public Library nor Tulane Library has a record of such a donation.

That the young H  l  ne Perret had a governess is unlikely. The author claimed that her governess died in 1832, and she was forced to continue her education at St. Michael's convent at what is now Convent, Louisiana.²¹ Mother Louise Callan, who located Sidonie's convent record,²² believed that governesses were rare and educational opportunities limited in the author's day:

²⁰Savoie, op. cit., p. 43.

²¹Ibid., p. 18.

²²The first official reference to her as Sidonie.

Private education, however, was carried on in the homes of many wealthy planters, whose sons and daughters were tutored by masters brought frequently from Europe and especially from France. The boys were prepared for college and the girls were instructed in all branches suitable for a young lady of the period. Only in rare cases were they allowed to follow the courses prescribed for their brothers, including Latin and Greek, and mathematics of a secondary type.²³

The situation described above is pertinent to the Attakapas region, where Sidonie's parents were living when she was of school age. A brief citation, with reference to the river parishes she had just left and to which she was returning for schooling, follows: "Good tutors were difficult to procure, and those who were engaged seemed to center their attention on the sons of the family."²⁴

Whether the young Sidonie was the precocious seven-year-old she described is a moot question. The fact is that she grew up in a fascinating and lively atmosphere.

Sidonie was the oldest surviving child of a family of twelve. Her parents were married on May 30, 1816, according to the registry of Saint John the Baptist Parish Church in Edgard, Louisiana. Her mother was still four months from

²³Louise Callan, R.S.C.J., The Society of the Sacred Heart in North America (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), p. 123.

²⁴Ibid., p. 155.

her fourteenth birthday. The first child was born two years later. She wrote in her paroissien: "Ce fils est mort en naissant." A little over two years later Sidonie was born. Two years later was born another girl, who probably died in infancy, as another girl bore the same name the following year. A son was born the next year (1824), but lived only a few months. Another daughter was born the following year. Two years later it was another girl. This brings us up to 1828, when Ursin Perret took his family to the Attakapas country. This date is predicated on the sale of his home and property in Saint John the Baptist Parish in that year and the absence of his name in legal records after that date.

Beginning with 1831 there is abundant evidence of the family's living in Saint Mary Parish. We may conclude that the move was a profitable one. If it was not so in the beginning, it must have at least appeared very promising. In the record of mortgages for Saint Mary Parish, we find an entry which is indicative of the family's financial prospects only three years after moving into the area. Ursin Perret borrowed \$80,000 to develop his land. His father, Pujol Perret, signed the note as guarantor to the New Orleans bank.²⁵

²⁵Court record, St. Mary Parish; April 17, 1831.

The optimism proved to be justified, and the family fortunes were undimmed until the Civil War.

Another girl was born in 1829, and in 1832 Ursin was born. He died a few months before his twentieth birthday.

We are now in the period of Sidonie's formal schooling. Fortunately, we have a record of this very brief period. Though the family was living in Franklin and somewhat closer to Grand Coteau than Convent, the family chose to send her to the newer and larger convent on the banks of the Mississippi.

Sidonie was enrolled in the Second Class, the highest level then taught. If she had been a regular student, she would have followed the curriculum that is listed.

Second Class

Gospel, Catechism, Church History
 Résumés of Ancient History and History of France
 Chronology of Modern History, memorized
 Arithmetic: complex problems, divisions and geometric calculations
 Literature: study of historical style, vocabulary;
 Fables of M. Loriguet [Nineteenth century Jesuit educator]²⁶

It would have been a good educational program for a girl of twelve. But how much could one absorb of it in three months? That was the length of her stay. Her record indicates: Registration on March 7, 1833 and Departure on

²⁶Callan, op. cit., p. 736.

May 31, 1833--the latter occasioned by a cholera epidemic. My informant, Mother Callan, assures me that such a short stay was in no way exceptional. Children would go to the convents to prepare for the reception of the sacraments. (In those days the First Communion was delayed until about the twelfth birthday and followed immediately by reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.) There is no record of grades, remarks, or observations.²⁷

Such was the formal education of our author. What do we know of her other education? Miss Caulfeild tells us that "Her school days were ended by her early marriage, but being a great reader, she taught herself."²⁸ She went on to say that Sidonie was so pleased with the results of her own education as an autodidact that she decided to teach others.²⁹ Certainly under the circumstances of an interrupted education and an early marriage, we must conclude with Miss Caulfeild that she was essentially self-educated.

The reputation of Sidonie de la Houssaye as a truly educated woman is without real foundation. No doubt, in a

²⁷Letter from Mother Callan, July 25, 1965.

²⁸Caulfeild, op. cit., p. 140.

²⁹Ibid.

town like Franklin, she was regarded as something of a prodigy. Elsewhere, and in her manuscripts, in particular, her clay feet are distressingly in evidence.

There is no question of her being conversant with even the fundamentals of Spanish or Italian. Confusion of the two languages was constant and resulted in the usual hybrid forms. Signorita for signorina and cavaliero for cavaliere occur on page 3 of the "Georges Gérard" manuscript.³⁰ Signor for señor and signora for señorita occur in the same work.³¹ In Dahlia we have a Brazilian speaking Spanish as his native language. This was possible, but unlikely. His answering "in the purest Castilian" with a signor is neither.³² These are not egregious examples; they are typical.

The author never attempted to go beyond French and English in quotations. The latter were generally a translation from French. German was even more of a terra incognita than Spanish and Italian. Her writing of fraulein and Goëte is indicative.

Her command of English was good for someone who

³⁰L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 4, p. 3.

³¹Ibid., p. 37.

³²De la Houssaye, loc. cit., Vol. 10, p. 363.

boasted of never having taken a lesson. She wrote easily and generally idiomatically. Past participles occasionally gave her trouble, e.g., *delaid*, he has choosed, etc. Proper adjectives received irregular treatment. The "french language" is frequent. We might add that her usage in French is not consistent on the same point. A Gallicized construction occurs occasionally. Typical is this one in a postal card note to Cable. "It happened to me last night to speak . . ." (*Il m'est arrivé ...*) Another mistake peculiar to French-speaking people is the failure to change their idiomatic use of the present tense. "Since the 27 of Dec. I am in New Orleans." (*Depuis le 27 decembre je suis à ...*)

There will be other opportunities to point to specific weaknesses in history. This was the only area in which her self-education proved to be a real handicap, as we shall later see.

Sidonie married at the early age of thirteen years and a few months. The incidents surrounding this marriage have been distorted almost beyond recognition. What is clear is that she married Louis Pelletier Delahoussaye³³ on

³³ Her husband and sons eschewed the particule and wrote Delahoussaye. Her spelling has survived.

December 3, 1833. This record is still in the registry of Saint Martin Church in Saint Martinville. Accounts of the wedding day differ. Tinker offers one version: "Le jour du mariage, la petite Sidonie est introuvable. On va à sa recherche.: l'enfant était assise sur le toit d'un poulailler en train de jouer à la poupée."³⁴ Miss Savoie, who also worked with the author's grandchildren, repudiated this version. According to her, the young ladies were reasonably sophisticated, and all the girls of Sidonie's age had as a vade mecum a work called "The Catechism of a Flirt."³⁵

Madame de la Houssaye rarely mentioned her husband in her letters. His name usually came in when she spoke of his distinguished relatives. The accounts she left in "Une Page de ma vie" are fictionalized.

Peltier de la Houssaye (we will adopt her spelling), thirteen years his wife's senior, was from an old family whose history has come down in a badly garbled form. This was by no means unique in the area. Saint Martinville probably has more sheer nonsense surrounding its history than any comparable town in the world. In the past, natives printed brochures

³⁴Tinker, op. cit., p. 108.

³⁵Savoie, op. cit., p. 35.

extolling this bastion of "pure thirteenth century French"! Aware of such a background, we will better understand some of the "history" she wrote and its origins.

The de la Houssayes were among the early settlers in Louisiana. Several had held important posts in the early days of the colony.³⁶ Somehow the pre-Louisiana history of the family became hopelessly entangled and confused in the oral traditions. The situation has only recently been ameliorated. In 1931, a member of the family wrote: ". . . it is more than passing strange that its history has not been written by any of the genealogists that have heretofore labored to unravel the tangled skeins of Louisiana pedigrees."³⁷ He further deplored the many lost and misplaced family records. If Sidonie had had access to better records, it is probable that her writing would have assumed a different cast. In disgust with such records, she wrote to Cable: "Il y a quelques jours, j'ai eu l'occasion d'examiner deux arbres généalogiques de notre famille--tous les deux entièrement différents--cela m'a dégoûtée des arbres généalogiques."³⁸ Given the aura of legend

³⁶ Arthur, op. cit., p. 205.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 205.

³⁸ Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, May, 1889.

in which Saint Martinville is steeped, it is not difficult to see how she arrived at some of her most cherished beliefs that are patently inadmissible--e.g., a de la Houssaye closely related to her husband was premier ministre under Louis XV. This probably started as a canard that got out of hand, as ancestry was wont to do among these people who took it quite seriously, if not always accurately. Madame was extremely vague on some of these relationships. Her husband told her that his family had lost several members to the guillotine during the French Revolution. He was not certain, however, if they were great-uncles or great-grand-uncles. Actually, all the latter-day genealogists could establish was a rather tenuous relationship between the wife of the first de la Houssaye in Louisiana, Magdeleine Victoire Petit de Livilliers, and the Chancelier d'Aguesseau.³⁹

The de la Houssayes in Saint Martinville and its environs--and they were numerous--seemed to have been in cattle raising for the most part. There is no reason to assume that Peltier de la Houssaye was not in this business. Sidonie has left us an idealized portrait of her husband

³⁹Arthur, op. cit., p. 235.

under the pseudonym of Captain Raymond.⁴⁰ It is the stereotyped picture of the steamboat captain. We can also note in it the composite romantic hero--the bravura of an Hernani and the passion and impetuosity of an Antony. Here is the portrait as seen in "Une Page de ma vie":

Le Capitaine Raymond était plutôt petit que grand, mais il y avait une grâce, une élégance infinie dans sa taille, chacun de ses mouvements, sa tête rejetée en arrière, sa voix fière et stridente--tout décelait l'homme habitué au commandement. Son oeil brun lançait parfois des éclairs et l'on devinait en lui une âme aux passions violentes; et en effet tout était violent dans cette âme. Le Capitaine ne savait rien faire à demi, l'amour, l'ambition, l'amitié, même, n'étaient pas des sentiments chez lui.⁴¹

The essential romanticism is evident. What she, no doubt, thought was a vigorous presentation strikes us as commonplace. Worse than the stylistic platitudes is the utter lack of verisimilitude. She was describing the man who was courting her. She married in 1833. There were no steamboats plying the Tèche until 1835!⁴² Her husband was briefly associated with Bayou Tèche steamboating in the late 1840's.

⁴⁰The name Raymond held some fascination for our author. In later years she used Louise Raymond as a nom de plume. I can offer no plausible explanation of its origin or significance.

⁴¹Cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 41.

⁴²St. Mary Banner and Franklin Tribune, April 28, 1959.

The Franklin Banner of June 14, 1849 had an advertisement for the Mondiana, a shallow draft, fast-running steamboat on the New Orleans to Saint Martinville run. Peltier de la Houssaye was listed as captain. The special "Historical & Progress Edition" of the St. Mary Banner and Franklin Tribune, dated April 28, 1959, does not mention Peltier de la Houssaye among the prominent steamboatmen of the 1840's and 1850's. The 1850 Census did not list any profession or occupation for him.

The couple's first child was born February 1, 1836 when the author was a few months past her fifteenth birthday. Alexandre Arthur was baptized almost two years later on January 27, 1838 in St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Such a delay would be unthinkable in contemporary Catholic practice. In the nineteenth century they were routine. In wealthy families, more often than not, baptisms coincided with a trip to New Orleans and the more socially acceptable St. Louis Cathedral. Otherwise, the condition of the roads was usually the major factor in determining the site of the ceremony. A boat trip to New Orleans, even though more than a hundred miles long, might be more feasible than twenty or thirty miles over impassable roads.

The second child, François Charles, was born on December 10, 1837 and baptized on April 25, 1842. The event,

which took place in New Iberia, was unusual. At the same ceremony two of the young wife's own sisters and one brother were baptized--the latter being younger than her own two children. Her sisters were Cécile Philomène (Azoline) born March 23, 1834, and Philomène Fanie born on June 1, 1836. The brother, Léon Horace, was born on October 20, 1839. This collective ceremony seems to indicate that the family rarely traveled during these years.

Between 1838 and 1842 Sidonie bore two children who did not survive their childhood. They were Henry Joseph and Lilia. A daughter, Lilia Maria, was born about 1843 and died in 1875. Madame's last child, Ludovic (Louis), was born on November 22, 1845 and lived until 1913.

The date 1841 marks the author's move to Franklin and her husband's installation as sheriff of St. Mary Parish. He held this office until 1845.

Debts and financial problems were never far away from the early 1840's until the author's death over fifty years later. On December 29, 1847, she was compelled to file suit to protect her paraphernal rights. At stake were \$2,000 and four slaves given by her mother about ten years earlier. Her husband "disposed of it for his individual interest":

Your petitioner further shows that owing to misfortunes on other causes, the affairs of her said husband

have become much embarrassed, that he is largely involved and unable to pay his debts, that your petitioner has reason to believe that her rights are in danger, and that the defendant estate may not be sufficient to meet her rights & claims.

.

The premises considered, your petitioner therefore prays . . . that she may have a judgment against her said husband for the amount of her pecuniary paraphernal rights as established by the act of donation . . . that she be authorized to have administration of her estate free from any interference on the part of her husband, and that the amount of the judgment to be rendered to be secured by a legal mortgage on the immovables and slaves of her husband as never owned & possessed by him on, or since the 3rd day of December 1833 [their wedding day], and by a privilege on the movable effects which he may now have in his possession, and that the same be seized and sold accordingly.⁴³

Toward the end of this decade Madame organized her first school. The Young Ladies Academy was opened in 1849 and closed during the Civil War.⁴⁴ Little is known about it. It was one of the earliest schools in Franklin, but not the first as tradition has it. Other schools preceding it were the Franklin Institute (1844), the Public School (1846), the co-educational Franklin Seminary (1847), and a Female Boarding and Day School (1848) under the auspices of the Episcopal church.⁴⁵

⁴³Court record, St. Mary Parish; December 29, 1847.

⁴⁴St. Mary Banner & Franklin Tribune, April 28, 1959.

⁴⁵Ibid.

In the same year her husband was master of a steamboat on the New Orleans to Saint Martinville run. Fires and other accidents were common, and in later years both he and his son could relate stories of saving their passengers. For one of these reasons, we may surmise, his profession was short-lived. In 1850, as already pointed out, he had no known occupation.

In 1851 the sheriff of St. Mary Parish seized and sold by virtue of a writ of fieri facias certain properties belonging to Peltier de la Houssaye in Saint Martinville. This action initiated by Madame de la Houssaye was the result of his various outstanding debts.⁴⁶

The following year we find a rather interesting letter written by her husband and included in the court record of a suit filed against both of them by the New Orleans firm of P. & E. Rielly & Co. The threat of this company to go to Mme Perret seems to be indicative of the mother's role, as guarantor of their debts:

Lorsque nous avons ouvert un compte chez vous, nos affaires étaient on ne peut plus florissantes--depuis un malheureux procès qui n'est pas terminé nous empêche de disposer d'aucune de nos propriétés ni même du produit de ces propriétés. Nous sommes certains de gagner ce procès. Mais en attendant nous sommes forcés bien malgré nous de faire attendre nos créanciers. Mme Delahoussaye vous a offert son billet portant intérêt,

⁴⁶Court record, St. Martin Parish; May 19, 1851.

vous l'avez refusé, en la menaçant de vous adresser à Mme Perret--heureusement que j'ai une lettre signée de vous dans laquelle vous me dites que vous m'enouvrez (sic) un compte tout-à-fait séparé de celui de Mme Perret.⁴⁷

The situation was steadily deteriorating and culminated in the sale of their home in 1859. A suit filed in March of the same year has a letter comparable to the one just cited: "Nous avons vendu notre habitation et ne recevrons d'argent qu'en mars."⁴⁸

It is unnecessary to multiply the examples attesting to their financial troubles. Suffice it to say that the couple were living above their means.⁴⁹ Their creditors frequently took their grievances to court--no less than twenty times in the period 1849-1859. Judgment was invariably in favor of the plaintiffs.

On January 12, 1859, Sidonie's only surviving daughter, Lilia, married John Tarlton. She was about sixteen; he was some six or seven years her senior and "un Américain." His birthplace is variously listed.⁵⁰ He was a Protestant. Prior

⁴⁷ Court record, St. Mary Parish; June 3, 1852.

⁴⁸ Ibid., March 29, 1859.

⁴⁹ Itemized bills submitted to the court show a preponderance of luxury items.

⁵⁰ Kentucky and South Carolina are given.

to the war he was a successful planter, but after the conflict he never regained a sound financial position. As late as 1870 he had not returned to his pre-war occupation. His wife died on March 23, 1875. She left eight children ranging from about fifteen down to two years. These were the author's "children," who were mentioned so often in her later letters. Here are their names and the names of their future spouses:

Lawrence Belser	unmarried ⁵¹
Charles Llewellyn	Rose Parshall
Caroline Frances ("Caro")	William G. Brady
Gabrielle Lilia	S. J. Cross
Helen Sidonia	unmarried ⁵²
Stella Mary	unmarried
Emma Jane	David W. Stafford
John	Elizabeth Wright ⁵³

The eve of the Civil War saw her husband working as a bookkeeper. Her oldest son was a clerk and the youngest boy was away at college. It is assumed that her school was still operating when the war started.

The war had no immediate effects that were apparent for most Louisiana families. Starting in 1862, however, one

⁵¹Lawrence Tarlton was mayor of Franklin in the late 1890's.

⁵²Helen Sidonia went by her second name. She was considered the most attractive of the girls.

⁵³John Tarlton was said to be living in Fort Worth, Texas as late as summer of 1965. Attempts to contact him were unsuccessful.

notices marked changes. From that year until 1865, life was slowed almost to a standstill. Civil records are virtually non-existent for the period. It is as though people stopped living, marrying, and dying. It is the period of newspapers printed on wallpaper; there was no other paper.

The year 1863 saw the first real fighting on Louisiana soil. Franklin had its share of the action in the form of a skirmish on the Irish Bend section of Bayou Tèche. Union forces drove away the local defenders, but almost immediately abandoned the area to push on to Alexandria. These events in April became completely overshadowed by the fall of Vicksburg in July. Even in Franklin, the effects of the action were not pronounced. The memory lingers on, however, in the still visible hulk of the Union gunboat Diana in Bayou Tèche. The boat was actually sunk by Union forces after the Confederates had captured it for their own use.

Shortly after the Irish Bend incident the author lost her husband. Her son Louis and her son-in-law were in the service at the time of his death. Booth shows no service record for her husband, and that is as would be expected of a man in his middle fifties.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Andrew B. Booth (compiler), Records of Louisiana Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands (New Orleans: Privately printed, 1920).

The circumstances of her husband's death were violent. Of this and the fact that it occurred in June 1863, we are certain. There is, however, no official record of his death, burial, or succession in Franklin. The version given by Tinker is dramatic--and apocryphal. Faute de mieux we repeat it:

M. de la Houssaye était sheriff de la ville; un jour pendant le repas de midi, ses agents viennent lui dire que quelques Texans pris de boisson, causent du désordre en ville. Il prend son fusil chargé de chevrotine et part pour calmer le vacarme. Un Texan caché sous une porte bondit sur de la Houssaye, lui arrache le fusil des mains, tourne le canon contre lui et l'étend raid mort.⁵⁵

A slightly condensed version of the incident appeared as late as 1950 in a Baton Rouge newspaper.⁵⁶ The article by Wilbur Douglas is called "The Story of Mme. Sidonie de la Houssaye" and is obviously based on Miss Savoie's thesis with the addition of updated references to living relatives. The flaw in this often repeated story is the lack of supporting evidence. Peltier de la Houssaye was not sheriff in 1863 for certain; William Haifliegh held the position at that time.

Madame de la Houssaye herself vaguely alluded to her

⁵⁵Tinker, op. cit., p. 108.

⁵⁶Morning Advocate (Baton Rouge), April 2, 1950.

husband's violent death. In an unpublished preface⁵⁷ to the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" which Cable bought and renamed the "Adventures of Françoise and Suzanne" in his Strange True Stories of Louisiana, there is a reference to his death at the hands of a secret society. She was probably thinking of the possibility of another story when she wrote that the descendants of the characters in her story were still living in St. Mary Parish. Many of them were in a mysterious and sinister organization called "Les Redoutables." (Her work on the subject bore the same title.) According to her, that Mafia-like organization held the parish in its grip until the Civil War. She claimed to have seen lists bearing her husband's and other respectable citizens' names in an envelope that was sealed at the time of his death. They were linked to the society and even to crimes:

... et là écrites de sa main et de la main d'autres individus que j'avais toujours considérés et respectés, la preuve de crimes affreux, et faut-il le dire sans mourir? ... la preuve que mon mari avait été frappé dans l'ombre, non par le poignard d'un vulgaire assassin [the probable truth],⁵⁸ mais par celui des Redoutables.⁵⁹

⁵⁷This preface was obviously designed to create interest in a sequel. Cable wisely omitted it. (MS in William Beer Cable Collection, Tulane Library.)

⁵⁸Times Picayune, June 4, 1913. This article following her son Louis' death mentions precisely this.

⁵⁹De la Houssaye, "Les Redoutables" (Preface), loc. cit.

That is the account destined for publication. It is most unlikely that she would have submitted the story if it had been true. The involvement with this fictitious group must be rejected. That her husband had incurred enemies in the line of duty is probable, but his death was about eighteen years after he had left office.

A possible explanation of her interest in secret societies is a history of vigilante committees that was published in 1861.⁶⁰ This curious work gave the names of both the "good" and the "bad." Specific cases in which "justice" was administered were cited. The names are easily recognizable, but the name of Peltier de la Houssaye is not among them. The stories, no doubt, fired her imagination, and she was quick to see the possibilities in them.

Following the war she re-opened her school which operated until the death of her daughter in 1875.⁶¹ Exactly when she re-opened it is uncertain; for she was postmistress in 1866,⁶² and this would have precluded other employment. A

⁶⁰ Alexandre Barde, Histoire des comités de vigilance aux Attakapas (St. Jean Baptiste, Louisiana: Meschacébé, 1861).

⁶¹ Savoie, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶² New Orleans Daily Crescent, February 12, 1866.

man replaced her in the post office the following year. We could, therefore, assign 1867 as a probable date of her second school. In the parish census of 1870 she is listed as a teacher.

Peace found her recently widowed and the mother of three grown children in the twenty to thirty age bracket. Her daughter had married in 1859. Her oldest son, Arthur, married his cousin Emilie Perret soon after. Louis married a Louana Kitchen of New Orleans in 1866. As we have noted, the census of 1870 lists Sidonie de la Houssaye as a teacher--the only time she is so designated. Her son-in-law was listed as "at home," i.e., unemployed. Her oldest boy was a drayman and her youngest a clerk on a boat. Of her parents pre-war opulence little remained. Her father showed total assets of \$10,000.⁶³ Farm lands were suffering from lack of attention and labor. The little remaining equipment was overage. Reconstruction was a bitter experience everywhere in the South, but Louisiana, it is generally agreed, suffered unduly in the process.⁶⁴

Discounting the dates of questionable works, we can say that the 1870's marked Sidonie's first real literary

⁶³U.S. Census, 1870. State of Louisiana. St. Mary Parish.

⁶⁴The author's contemporaries who were interviewed for this study had vivid recollections of this period that they doubtlessly acquired from their parents.

efforts. Nothing appeared until the next decade, but she did mention to Cable in 1885 that, "Les Redoutables" had been in progress since 1874.⁶⁵ The beginning of this work coincides with the closing of her second school, according to the date assigned by Caulfeild.⁶⁶

Her daughter died on March 23, 1875, and she felt obligated to raise her grandchildren. Her son-in-law was probably back in the planting business at this time; he was known to be a planter in the 1880's. His role in supporting his children remains nebulous. Madame de la Houssaye always spoke as though she were their sole support. A contemporary recalled her as a busybody with a propensity for raising other peoples' children. In the case of her own grandchildren there is an apparent mixture of grandmotherly concern and "smother love." Twelve years after her daughter's death she wrote her feelings to Cable. In this particular letter she was trying to explain her lack of resources and her dependence on her grandchildren:

Mais Mr. Tarlton était encore jeune [and handsome] et j'étais tourmentée de l'idée qu'il pourrait se remarier et m'enlever ses enfants. Pour essayer de l'empêcher, je passai un acte de donation de ma maison à mes petits enfants, me conservant seulement le droit de rester toujours avec eux ... mais en faisant cela,

⁶⁵ Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

⁶⁶ Caulfeild, op. cit., p. 140.

je me privais des moyens de gagner ma vie en tenant un pensionnat ou un boarding house.⁶⁶

Present-day psychiatrists might find such feelings unhealthy.

The author's father died in April, 1877. Her mother was to outlive Sidonie by four years. She was past her eightieth birthday when the Cable correspondence began. Unknowingly she played a part in it. In one letter she is cited to Cable for her memory of certain distant events; in the very next one she is described as senile and infirm.

The late 1870's, we may assume, were devoted principally to the education of her grandchildren, who were then in their formative years. Her youngest son, now a successful riverboat captain living in New Orleans, never came back to Franklin except for visits. The grandchildren stayed on in the house she left them. A few years after her death, her house was razed and a much more modern one erected on the same site. This second house was occupied by Mrs. Emma Tarlton Stafford until her death a few years ago.

Madame de la Houssaye's school re-opened a second time in September 1882. It was now coeducational. Judging

⁶⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1887.

from the contents of her letters, it must have lasted barely a year. In January of 1884, she was looking for work. She continued private tutoring in French when she could find pupils. In later years when she rarely left her room, children filed up the narrow stairs to her room for their catechism lessons.

As far as can be determined, Sidonie de la Houssaye's first published work appeared in 1883. This was Le Mari de Marguerite which appeared en feuilleton in L'Abeille from August 26, 1883 to December 16, 1883.⁶⁷ "Chattanooga," written expressly for the patent medicine trade, dates from this year also. In the same year we find her at one of her characteristic manoeuvres--trying to sell L'Abeille the French version of "Voyage de ma grand-mère" and the Times Democrat the English version at the same time. At this point James Birney Guthrie, an agent for Cable, entered the negotiations.

The following January (1884), she wrote her first letter to Cable unaware that she was already dealing with him through the sly Mr. Guthrie. We intend to discuss the literary and business aspects of their relationship in the next chapter. Here we will simply quote the letters as they are

⁶⁷Both Tinker, op. cit., p. 112, and Savoie, op. cit., p. 133 incorrectly list the last date as December 18, 1883.

appropriate to her personal life. They constitute a veritable jeremiad, and the complaints are consistent--no work, no money, and no publisher. In her very first letter following a meeting with Cable in New Orleans around New Year's day 1884 she introduced the themes:

Ne trouvant rien à faire dans le village de Franklin, je suis venue à la Nelle Orléans avec l'espoir d'y trouver quelque chose à faire: des leçons de français, des copies, des traductions, j'aurais tout accepté; mais hélas! jusqu'à présent, je n'ai rien, absolument rien trouvé et je suis bien découragée!

.
Comme je vous l'ai dit une fois, mes observations me trompent rarement, et si, comme je le crois, vous êtes aussi bon que vos yeux et votre sourire le disent, vous ne me refusez pas votre aide, et peut-être que, grâce à vous, je pourrai rencontrer un libraire qui consentira à acheter quelques uns de mes manuscrits.⁶⁸

The date of their first meeting can be approximated by noting her arrival in New Orleans and Cable's departure from that city. She arrived on December 27, 1883, as the next letter informs us. Cable was back in the East to continue his lecture tour there on January 14, 1884.⁶⁹

Almost a month later to the day, she repeated her sup-
plications in English, although French was the usual language

⁶⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 18, 1884.

⁶⁹Arlin Turner, George W. Cable a Biography (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), p. 151.

in her correspondence with Cable:

I feel ashamed of myself when I see that I am forced to bother you once more! but necessity that cruel tyrant who knows nothing of delicacy and good manners, forces me to do it against my feelings. Since the 27 of Dec. I am [sic] in New Orleans where I came with hope to get something to do as to be able to support myself and my children [grandchildren]. Alas! Alas! I have found nothing, absolutely nothing! and will probably have to return to Franklin where I have a home.

.
Once more I say: Mr. Cable, with a few words you can help a woman, a mother in great need, for Pity [sic] sake do it!⁷⁰

Later in the same year she planned to return to New Orleans to look again for work.

Je pense être à la Nelle Orléans en Septembre et y demeurer entièrement si je puis y trouver de l'ouvrage. Votre soeur n'aurait-elle pas besoin d'une maîtresse de français dans son école?

.
Ma santé n'est pas très bonne depuis mon retour à Franklin. ... je serai heureuse, bien heureuse, de recevoir vos visites dans mon petit H o m e tout aussi humble qu'il sera.⁷¹

Her last wish was not realized until three years later.

In July she renewed her pleas. "Vous connaissez ma situation mon cher monsieur, ma plume est mon soutien et celui de mes enfants." As though utterly oblivious of this statement, she did a complete turnabout a page later.

⁷⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, February 19, 1884.

⁷¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, May 11, 1884.

"Franchement je ne travaille pas pour \$." Scarcely have we assimilated this change, when we are back in our original position: "Mère de famille, sans soutien que moi-même, il me faut travailler, non pour la gloire, mais pour l'argent."⁷² That Cable kept his sanity through this correspondence is much to his credit.

A letter in quaintly Gallicized English reiterates the themes:

. . . a cruel Nemesis, Need, was there, repeating to my ear: "Where to take the food? Where to take the necessities of life?"--and as a slave I had to obey: to give french [sic] lessons, to write (copies) for public offices, to sew coarse shirts and pants for stores, and to be thankful, even when I can get such work.⁷³

The tenor of her 1884 correspondence is essentially the same. Cable had bought her "Voyage de ma grand'mère," "Lettre de ma tante," and "Alix de Morainville" as "true stories." She began "Georges Gérard" in that year to capitalize on the expected popularity of the Alix story.

One year made no difference in her position. "La vie est toujours bien dure de mon côté."⁷⁴ A ray of hope that

⁷²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 19, 1884.

⁷³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 17, 1884.

⁷⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 6, 1885.

quickly dimmed was a request by Mr. Charles Scribner for some Louisiana sketches.⁷⁵ She sent "Claire," a Louisiana novel whose infidelity theme ruffled Mr. Scribner. "Black Draught," whose title alone prejudices the reader against it, dates from this period. The seemingly endless Quarteronne series saw its inception in the same year. Octavia, the first of the series, was forwarded to Mr. Scribner. It fared no better than "Claire."⁷⁶

Her last letter of the year begins conventionally:

"... nous sommes en plein hiver, (cet enfer des familles pauvres) voilà la Noël que les enfants attendent avec impatience lorsque la pauvre mère n'a rien, absolument rien!"

We are then introduced to two new themes. The first is an apparently sincere conviction of the worth of her work:

"Savoir que mes écrits sont bons, convaincue qu'ils seraient appréciés par le Public et ne trouver un ami qui me tende la main pour m'aider de sortir de cette triste position." The second is a feeling of being frustrated by fate: "... il y a un mauvais sort qui pèse et qui a toujours pesé sur ma

⁷⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

⁷⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, December 3, 1885.

destinée."⁷⁷ If anyone had had any doubts about the essentially romantic philosophy of the author, the last sentence should have dispelled them once and for all.

In the new year (1886) Gina, a Quarteronne story, was started and the "Black Draught" story was given the somewhat more euphonious title of "La Plante Sacrée." She complained of rheumatism for the first time in September.⁷⁸ Earlier in the year her son-in-law found himself in a state of insolvency. He had been unsuccessful as a sugar and rice planter on Fairfax plantation about five miles downstream from Franklin. She must have at that time assumed full responsibility for her grandchildren, if, indeed, she had not already done so.

Gina occupied her well into 1887. The year was a good one from a purely literary standpoint. She sold La Dame au masque noir to the Franco-Americain in New Orleans for use en feuilleton. Pouponne et Balthazar, an Acadian novel written at Cable's suggestion, was finished. In her opinion it was a masterpiece, but it had to wait until the following spring for a publisher. The Journal de l'Opinion in New Orleans published it.

⁷⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, December 15, 1885.

⁷⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 23, 1886.

If the literary picture was brighter, her personal relations were at an all time low. She now emerges publicly as a controversial figure who stirred up her home town via the New Orleans press. All of this resulted when a chatty letter to a distant relative was innocently published without her knowledge. The letter and the remarks that preface it will be presented almost in their entirety. Her concern for the genteel poor betrayed her snobbish attitude which occasionally came to the surface.

"Suffering in Franklin"
An Eloquent Appeal for Aid for Destitute Families

Mrs. Eugène Soniat of this city has received a touching letter from a friend in Franklin, La., giving an account of the great destitution which prevails in that section of Louisiana, among families heretofore wealthy but now in reduced circumstances. Mrs. de la Houssaye, the writer, narrates the efforts made by charitable ladies to relieve the distressed. It seems the ladies are at present engaged in making an elaborate quilt to be raffled for the poor, and that they are sadly in want of pink fabrics in silk, plush or cretones to complete the quilt.

We give below the interesting letter and inform the charitably-inclined who would wish to supply the desired fabrics, to send their contributions in that line to the States office for transmission and delivery to Mrs. Soniat.

The letter is as follows:

Dear Madam--Do not be too surprised if you receive this letter, after such a prolonged silence . . . I now intend to ask a great favor of you; I feel ashamed, but hear me and judge after you have heard.

In 1841, I came to Franklin, and though quite young, (I was married at 13), I was already married. In the midst of poverty surrounding us, I appealed to several ladies who aided me in forming a society called "Ladies of Good Relief." That society built the Catholic Church of Franklin, and during the war erected a soldiers' hospital. I could not tell you one half the good work done by the society of which I am, or rather was, the president. To-day, owing to the impoverished conditions of the principal families of our parish, owing to differences in creeds and race prejudice, that society is languishing. Many people have forgotten that it exists. Before the war there were over 300 ladies in the society, and to-day it numbers only five members. Some refuse to join because we extend help to negroes, others because they hold we should not relieve Jews. During the past summer we suffered terribly from sickness. In fifteen days a whole family was stricken and died. Druggists refuse credit and physicians are reluctant to succor negroes. After the sickly summer came the present winter season, the most severe I have experienced. This morning I witnessed a heart-rending spectacle, a poor woman, who was once in affluence and who is of eminently respectable family, a widow, in a wretched hovel, with seven small children, and without fire. I was able to temporarily relieve their wants, but what will become of them eventually? And what will become of other unfortunate beings?

This preamble concluded, I come to what I wish to request.

I do not ask financial aid, and will state that I have noticed that fancy objects made from pieces of silk, cretonne and wool sell very well. . . . We expect to give ere long, a fair for the benefit of the poor.

My Dear Cousin--I ask you to come to our relief in this. Myself and little daughter are making a quilt embroidered with bouquets, flowers, fruits, birds, etc.; the quilt is made out of pieces of silk, plush, satin and woollens; we need some pink fabrics. Could you obtain some for us? Please help us in this; our poor are deserving; we have here some old ladies formerly

wealthy, but now more than shabby genteel; we have little children who cry from insufficient feeding.

My youngest daughter, a gay and active miss, says, jokingly: "Ask Mrs. Soniat to send us a big barrellful of remnants! I conclude in begging you to receive the assurance of highest esteem.

S. de la Houssaye⁷⁹

Thus ended her letter, which Mrs. Soniat took the liberty of translating and publishing.

Her enemies, who were legion, attached her from all quarters, each in his own way. Catherine Cole (Mrs. Martha R. Field) was patronizing. She exacerbated the frayed nerves of the Franklin citizens in her "Here at Home" Sunday column which came forty-eight hours after the letter to the editor submitted by Mrs. Soniat.

"Here at Home"

Some time ago a distinguished Creole lady living in one of the parishes, in a town to which she removed almost half a century ago, a married woman, aged 13 years, began in the New Orleans Bee a story of Creole life. It had run through two or three numbers of L'Abeille, when the lady received a fine financial offer from Mr. Cable to purchase the story. The price offered by Mr. Cable was largely in excess of the sum contracted for with the Bee, and the editor of that paper, with the sympathy, unselfishness and courtesy for which he is distinguished, most handsomely destroyed his contract and allowed her to sell the story to Mr. Cable, which she did. I am told that "Carancro,"

⁷⁹The Daily States (New Orleans), January 14, 1887.

now appearing in the Century, has been partly gleaned by Mr. Cable (in all honorable ways) from his purchase.

This lady lives in Franklin, La. Franklin is an old, little known town, inhabited by Creoles and full of the elements for Creole character sketches, so much in demand. Some of the best names of Louisiana still exist in Franklin. The story comes from this high authority of the most distressing destitution among people who, before the war, might have sandwiched their French rolls with American bank bills. Her letter describing the patient, noble enduring of poverty, the scanty meals of a cupful of "grits," or a handful of beans--the wan faces of the little children who will admit, after much pressing, that they have not "taken their breakfast" because there was none to take--is inexpressibly touching. One would as soon think of buying an English coronet, as offering alms to these ladies, but Madame--makes a request that will surely find response. These ladies and young girls and grandmothers are beautiful embroiderers and makers of fancy work. They make things so perfectly that they can sell all that they can produce if only they have the proper materials, and Madame ___ begs for scraps of velvet, lace, plush, floss, canvas, mull, anything dainty and convertible into fancy work.

A little, lonesome, dingy, dreary town, with beautiful and picturesque Creole houses, with roses everywhere and under the tiled roofs and behind the pink plastered walls, and the stately columns supporting the porches, Creole gentlewomen and Creole girls who have not often "amused" themselves as Olympe did, are bending their pretty heads over embroidery, trying to solve in impractical crewel and silken floss the problems of living. Surely it is a trifle these gentle creatures need of us. I undertake to deliver to Madame ___ any contributions of fancy work material that may be sent to me at this office.⁸⁰

It will be noted that Catherine Cole did not mention Madame de la Houssaye by name. She merely repeated all the

⁸⁰The Daily Picayune (New Orleans), January 16, 1887.

pertinent information that would be necessary for a positive identification! The reference to Carancro was simply a gratuitous attack on Cable which only proved that Catherine Cole was ignorant of the facts. Cable had bought the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" under the circumstances Miss Cole noted. The only connection between the stories is that they both take place in Louisiana. Miss Cole was at least non-partisan. She attacked Cable and the Creoles with equal vigor. This was hardly orthodox in New Orleans where the lines were sharply drawn. The citizenry was either pro-Creole and anti-Cable (the great majority) or pro-Cable and anti-Creole. Any other position was almost unthinkable.

A scathing reply, written by a citizen of Franklin with a literary bent, was not long in coming:

"A Voice from the Tèche in Defense of Franklin"

Editor Picayune: In Saturday's issue of the States appears a letter over the signature of S. de la Houssaye, which makes such glaring misstatements of facts, calculated to throw odium upon our little town, that the spirit moves me, in kindness to Mme de la Houssaye, to correct the impression which her letter is calculated to convey. In the Sunday Picayune, under the caption of "Here at Home," your clever correspondent, Catherine Cole, takes up the strain and "damns us with faint praise," referring to our pleasant little town as an "old, little known town inhabited by Creoles, and full of the elements for Creole sketches so much in demand." She might have added "so funnily caricatured by George W. Cable." Her description of our "little, lonesome, dreary, dingy town with beautiful and picturesque Creole

houses, with roses everywhere," distinctly proves that our neat, dapper little town, full of wide-awake, active Americans, is as Catherine Cole asserts, evidently little known, to her at least. Now, to come to the travesty in the shape of a letter in the States. As a matter of fact, there is no such destitution here except among some few negro families who are too lazy to work, and depend entirely upon filching for the wherewith to keep the wolf from the door.

It is charitable to suppose that some of these have imposed upon poor Mme de la Houssaye with heartrending tales of destitution and misery, and that she in the goodness of her heart has written to Mrs. Soniat asking aid in the way of "pink fabric, etc." If such cases did occur in our midst, would "pink fabrics of woolen, cretonne, plush, etc.," fill hungry mouths or warm shivering toes as well as "shoulder meat" and "grits" which Louisiana people lavished with open hand on the suffers at Johnson's Bayou and Sabine Pass? The letter also casts almost an insult at our physicians and druggists. We all know that physicians, aided by the druggists, do the greatest amount of charity in our community as well as every other: and last, but not least, the fling at the ladies was uncalled for and unjust. No entertainment for charitable purposes, no application for help, from deserving sources, ever meets with refusal from the noble-hearted ladies of Franklin, who, God bless them, never had a chance to "sandwich their French rolls with American bank bills." From their little store, they gave freely, heartily, and feel that "Charity, like the gentle rain, blessed him that gave and him that received."

Hoping that other pens from Franklin more facile than mine may "take up the cudgels" in defense of our dear little town.

I am yours, etc. Vindex⁸¹

A meeting was called in Franklin to disprove Madame de la Houssaye's allegations. The newspaper in Franklin picked

⁸¹The Daily Picayune (New Orleans), January 19, 1887.

up the story and, we may assume, came to the town's defense at her expense. More was at stake for her than this simple incident. Underlying her apprehension was the fear that her lack of rapport with Cable at that time would come to light. Cable was not at all satisfied with the explanation of certain discrepancies in the "true stories." The double scorn of Cable and her neighbors was to be avoided at all costs. Her dread of adverse publicity and even retaliatory action by the men-folk in her family was apparently real.

Her version of the incident did not appear until an April letter to Cable. It is a revealing letter. It paraphrases what we have quoted from the press, and it gives an unflattering picture of the author among her neighbors. If her treatment of the local editor was typical, it is a wonder that her snobbish attitude did not get her into more trouble in Franklin. Her letter began with some information relative to problems in the "true stories." Then she explained the publication of her letter, which was, incidentally, translated by Mrs. Soniat:

. . . the result of such a publication called
[sic] a real cyclone in the town of Franklin.

There is in Franklin only one newspaper kept by a company of colored men, but the editor is a white man "un homme de bas étage" who was too happy to be able to attack an innocent lady whose only crime is

to be above him and to have refused to receive his visits. He wrote an infamous article against me, dragged my name in the mud. My grandson forced him to take all back in the next issue of his paper, but the first impression was there and many people prefer it to the second--then came Catherine Cole . . . Now Sir, all this like to [sic] kill me. For a month, I was in bed, and my sons, big men, crying like babies about their mother's humiliation. I heard one of them, the Captain, say "How glad I would be to give 10 years of my life to get a revenge from that Soniat, but she is a woman!" There were two parties: Friends & Enemies [sic]. I did not know I had so many friends; but, oh! mon Dieu! I did not know that I had so many enemies! A Mrs. Chambers, the hotel keeper, went so far as to send the reporter of the Item to me (in my sorrow and humiliation) after telling him a lot of shameful stories on me; but he was a gentleman, and as soon as he heard me, he turned on my side.

Many hate me just as others hate you, through jealousy, because we occupy a certain situation in the literary world. Well understand that you are at the head of the ladder when I am at its foot. And every one of my enemies, as a great insult, call me "Cable's friend." . . . I am ready for all, even to commit suicide! I am exaggerating nothing.

.

Excuse that long letter. I consider it a duty to tell you everything. The thought of recommencing the life of Jan. and Feb. last, is above my strength. I am suffering from an aneurism of the heart and the Doctor tells me it may kill me at every moment. I am ready!⁸²

If January and February had been trying months, June certainly made up for them. In that month Cable visited her in Franklin for the first and only time, as far as we can determine. Tradition to the contrary, there is no reason to

⁸²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 26, 1887.

believe that Cable was a regular visitor in Franklin. This one visit was a brief one, for in an August letter she spoke of "the few hours you passed in Franklin."⁸³ It probably seemed more impressive to the grandchildren, who retained tangible evidence of it in the form of souvenirs sent by Cable upon his return to the East.

Lafayette was also on Cable's itinerary, and in that town he talked a little too freely, not being aware that one of his interlocutors was a resident of Franklin and the sister of the druggist who had called the protest meeting against her. Rumors circulated in Franklin. The exact nature of Cable's remarks is not known, but she thought he had said something insulting or ambiguous enough to be so construed.⁸⁴

A July letter speaks of business transactions with a French author: " ... en ce moment, j'envoie presque tous les mois des histoires américaines à un auteur français de haute réputation, qui est fort honorable et qui signe mes oeuvres de son nom."⁸⁵ She did not mention the name of any works, nor

⁸³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 17, 1887.

⁸⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, June 26, 1887.

⁸⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 30, 1887.

did she name the recipient of them. The fact that she was trying to influence Cable to enter into a comparable arrangement casts doubt on her unsupported statement. Her motives were clear: "A mon âge la réputation d'auteur distingué m'est indifférente et j'ai de nombreux besoins. Voilà pourquoi je préfère l'argent au renom."⁸⁶ She ended with a postscript: "Depuis que vous m'avez parlé de Northampton [Cable had been living in Northampton, Mass. since the summer of 1886] vous m'avez inspiré le désir d'y aller y passer quelques années comme maîtresse de français. Qu'en pensez-vous?"⁸⁷

The manuscript of Pouponne et Balthazar was sent to Cable. Fearing its rejection, she cautioned Cable about sending it back through the mail. A rejected manuscript would be more grist for her enemies' mills:

Une autre prière. Si vous me renvoyez le manuscrit, renvoyez-le par Express: le maître de poste est un de mes mortels ennemis et s'il voyait revenir le man. il en parlerait partout, et ma réputation en souffrirait.⁸⁸

March of the following year brought sickness to her granddaughter Caro. Her sadness was tempered by the sale of

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 5, 1887.

three stories:

J'ai été assez heureuse depuis quelques mois: j'ai vendu à Paris, au Petit Courrier des Dames, L'Arche de Noé (Le nom d'une plantation), à New York, à Wm. Jenkins, j'ai vendu L'Enfant perdue, un conte d'enfants et Pouponne et Balthazar à l'éditeur du journal de l'Opinion.⁸⁹

There is no manuscript extant of L'Arche de Noé, and there is no record of Jenkins having published L'Enfant perdue. At the same time the Quarteronne stories were under examination by Frederic Soulié's son in Paris.⁹⁰

Her enemies could smirk as they pointed to Cable's article in the November issue of Century Magazine.⁹¹ Cable wrote of the problems involved in documenting his "true stories." Naturally, he mentioned the means he used to verify them. Madame de la Houssaye believed that this was extremely bad taste, especially since she was involved. A public airing would serve no useful purpose, she thought: "... j'étais loin de croire que vous parleriez de ces preuves comme vous l'avez fait. C'est un os de plus que vous avez jeté à mes ennemis."⁹²

⁸⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 9, 1888.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹George W. Cable, "Strange True Stories of Louisiana: How I Got Them," Century Magazine, XXXVII (November, 1888), 110-14.

⁹²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 13, 1888.

After November, 1888, there were no more letters until the following March. She excused herself on the grounds that she had been harassed almost beyond her endurance by a flood of abusive letters:

... ma seule excuse est en ceci. J'ai été ennuyée à mort, menacée, persécutée, par les différentes lettres que je recevais de tous côtés. Depuis la grande maladie que j'ai faite l'été passé, je suis restée faible, un rien m'effraie et me donne de terribles palpitations de coeur.⁹³

She must have received a letter from Cable on the same day that she wrote the last letter. She saw fit to write the following day in her defense. Someone had sent Cable a "memorandum" that needed refutation: "If as you said, someone sent you the memorandum, it must be an enemy--alas! We have some and many--believe me dear Mr. Cable, for me, if not for you. Answer it with contempt."⁹⁴

She risked misunderstanding with Cable in preference to airing her troubles in Franklin. Her own family was even in the dark. It was only with the greatest reluctance that she allowed her granddaughter's husband to act as a character witness for her. Needless to say, this connection was not mentioned to Cable: "Si je ne l'ai pas fait tout de suite

⁹³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 30, 1889.

⁹⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 31, 1889.

[produced a witness] c'est que je tiens secrètes nos petites dissensions; je sais que si elles étaient connues à Franklin, les gazettes en retentiraient ... je ne veux pas exposer mes fils."⁹⁵ The concern for her sons was genuine. Franklin had a reputation for violence, and her youngest son may be recalled as one easily aroused when the family's honor was at stake.

A letter a few days later alludes to her habit of late rising. The habits of her younger days are not known, but in her declining years she retired early and slept late. She occasionally noted that it was past ten o'clock and time to go to bed. Ten o'clock was also the hour she arose. "Je me suis levée à quatre heures ce matin pour pouvoir recevoir la communion (je suis Catholique) et cela m'a extrêmement fatiguée, moi qui me lève ordinairement à 10 heures!"⁹⁶

On April 22, 1889, she reiterated her demand for no unfavorable publicity:

Si les journaux de la La. s'en mêlent, si mes ennemis de Franklin déchirent mon nom et mon coeur, mon fils le capitaine répondra à son tour, hélas! hélas! mes amis d'un côté, les vôtres de l'autre! et ce sera une véritable guerre dont je serai la 1^{re} victime.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1889.

⁹⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 15, 1889.

⁹⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 22, 1889.

A July letter returned to the earlier themes of unemployment and poverty. "Encore, si je pouvais trouver de l'ouvrage, mais rien. ... si je pouvais trouver des traductions (anglais en français) mais je le répète, rien!"⁹⁸

A letter by Cable in the September, 1889 Century Magazine precipitated another crisis.⁹⁹ In his letter Cable discounted the possibility of fraud on her part, but the mere mention of such a thing before the public was too much for her. This time the family could not be kept out of the dissension. A "méchante personne" translated the Century letter for her aged mother. The "méchante personne" was later identified as a brother-in-law, who, contrary to his usual habits, picked up an English magazine to read on the train.¹⁰⁰ This English magazine, as fate would have it, was the Century Magazine.

Her last letter of 1889 indicates that she was fully cognizant of her situation. "Vous connaissez ma triste situation, vieille comme je le suis, le travail est ma seule

⁹⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 13, 1889.

⁹⁹George W. Cable, a letter in "Open Letters," "Strange True Stories of Louisiana," Century Magazine, XXXVIII (September, 1889), 798-99.

¹⁰⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, October 11, 1889.

ressource, et un auteur français court risque de mourir de faim aux Etats-Unis."¹⁰¹ All was not gloomy, however: "Je vous envoie un exemplaire de mon histoire acadienne [Pouponne et Balthazar] ... Elle m'a rapporté \$250 déjà."¹⁰²

Her last letter to Cable is dated January 21, 1890. She was still trying to get the Quarteronne series published. Pessimism is more in evidence as she approaches her seventieth birthday: "Il est si triste à mon âge de travailler sans succès."¹⁰³

We can only speculate as to the reasons for the severing of connections between Madame and Cable. When we discuss their business relationship, we shall see that their six year correspondence was marked by misunderstanding, ruffled feelings and tension to the breaking point on several occasions.

Old age was not without its consolations. L'Athénée Louisianais bestowed its gold medal ex aequo on her and a Mlle Bernard in April 1890. She had submitted two entries: "La Fauvette et le poète" and "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours." "An allegory of love beautifully told, and

¹⁰¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 21, 1890.

a pastoral prose poem written in an elevated and highly-finished style, and also treating of love, composed this interesting and much admired paper."¹⁰⁴ The allegory and the pastoral are extracted from one of the earlier volumes of her manuscript collection. Volume 5, as it is presently designated, has works dated consecutively: October 19, 1838; October 5, 1856; January 6, 1839; "La Fauvette et le poète" (undated); "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours," 1857; an undated two-page story; a work dated July 14, 1840, etc. The dates obviously do not refer to the dates of composition. The style is as the newspaper article reported it. It is also unlike her habitual style. When I first read these works, I was struck by the style and immediately characterized them for my own reference "some of her best." This judgement was based on a reading of the works in manuscript, for, at the time, I did not associate them with the Athénée Louisianais prize. Further reading leads me to believe that they are the best of some one else. The ledger book (Mme de la Houssaye wrote in large, hard-bound notebooks--of the type used by accountants) from which they are extracted appears to be the oldest of the collection.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Daily Picayune (New Orleans), April 14, 1890.

¹⁰⁵L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 5.

It also appears to be a book in which she copied stories. Absence of corrections, re-writing, etc., is a notable feature of these stories. The use of allegory, as it is found here, was foreign to her style. The only other case is in La Mariolle, which is labeled in her own hand as a translation from a Chicago newspaper.¹⁰⁶ If we grant that she did write these stories, and I do not, we must explain the remarkable decline in her powers since her mid-thirties. Such cases are not without precedent, but they are uncommon.

On the other hand, there is a very definite precedent for her submitting another person's work as her own. Her first commercial success, Le Mari de Marguerite, was not her own work, but she sold it to L'Abeille, where it appeared as such. In her manuscript collection the work is called Sybille, and it is annotated "Traduit de l'anglais de Mary [sic] Agnes Fleming."¹⁰⁷ This fact went unnoticed until Miss Savoie pointed it out in 1936.¹⁰⁸ We might add, parenthetically, that fraud was detected that very year in the Athénée Louisianais contest. A competitor missed a possible prize because in his plagiarism

¹⁰⁶L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 18.

¹⁰⁷L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 19.

¹⁰⁸Savoie, op. cit., p. 133.

he underestimated the committee's knowledge of Pascal.¹⁰⁹

We will return to the literary problems later. A vivid picture of Sidonie de la Houssaye, the lauréate, has been preserved for us by the Creole physician and littérateur, Dr. Alfred Mercier. It was he who read the prize-winning manuscript at the public reception. (It was customary to read the prize-winning works and then announce the winner's name to the audience whose curiosity had already been whetted.)

Désigné pour lire l'autre manuscrit de dame, j'ai essayé d'en faire ressortir toute la valeur. L'enveloppe contenant la signature de l'auteur, ayant été ouverte, le public accueillit par un long applaudissement le nom de Mme de la Houssaye. C'était la première fois que je voyais cette dame; je la connaissais seulement par quelques uns de ses écrits, et par des lettres qu'elle m'avait adressées, en différentes occasions, pour me demander de lui rendre de petits services. Elle s'était toujours présentée à mon esprit sous les dehors d'une personne âgée, petite de taille, vive et loquace. Comme cela arrive souvent en pareille circonstance, je m'étais trompé de tout au tout. Quand j'allai au-devant d'elle, pour la conduire à l'estrade où elle allait recevoir sa médaille des mains du général Beauregard, je me trouvai en face d'une grande et forte femme, les lèvres pincées et rentrées dans une bouche d'octogénaire édentée. Elle prit, sans proférer une seule parole, le bras que je lui offris. Je remarquai, chemin faisant, qu'elle avait, au plus haut degré, cette expression maussade et hautaine qui malheureusement dépare la physionomie de beaucoup de nos dames créoles; en croyant se donner un cachet de distinction et de dignité, elles se rendent déplaisantes et antipathiques. Je reconduisis Mme de la Houssaye à sa place. Elle marchait d'un pas très lent. Si elle avait

¹⁰⁹Robertson, op. cit., p. 287.

été une de ces vieilles aimables, qui se font un point d'honneur de se montrer reconnaissantes, ou au moins polies, envers ceux qui ont fait de leur mieux pour les obliger, elle m'eût remercié, en quelques mots de la peine que je venais de prendre pour bien lire son manuscrit. Au lieu de cela, silence absolu! la lauréate sortit son bras du mien comme elle l'y avait passé, sans la moindre inclination de corps ou de tête. Allons, pensai-je, je le vois, Madame de la Houssaye occupe le premier rang parmi ces personnes qui croient que tout leur est dû, et qu'elles ne doivent absolument rien aux autres.¹¹⁰

The portrait is invaluable, coming as it does from the foremost Creole writer of the day, Dr. Alfred Mercier. To his literary discernment he added the clinician's acumen. The physical description is certainly borne out by the few portraits we possess--all of which date from her mature years. The assessment of her character was remarkable, especially in view of the fact that he had been favorably predisposed.

We cannot definitely attribute any of her works to the post-1890 period. Efforts to publish earlier works were continued. In April, 1891, she had the satisfaction of having her granddaughter succeed her as lauréate of L'Athénée Louisianais. "Having," and not "seeing," was chosen because neither she nor the lauréate was present at the public reception.¹¹¹ This prize winning in the family gets more and more curious.

¹¹⁰Robertson, op. cit., pp. 287-90.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 310.

Again we can make a good case for the assertion that fraud was involved. The best proof is the existence of the prize-winning story in Sidonie de la Houssaye's own hand in her manuscript collection.¹¹² "Rose Blanche," the award winner, is her work. The style, vocabulary, and philosophy brand it as such. She never mentioned that her granddaughter was proficient in French style. On the other hand, we know that she feared that her "children" would forget their French. Let us recall that the lauréate herself was not present. Mr. James Freret,¹¹³ who also handled some copyright work for Madame de la Houssaye, accepted the prize. She was not averse to putting her name on someone else's work, nor was she opposed to someone's signing her own work for a consideration. We should consider all these factors before discounting the possibility of fraud, remembering that a cash prize was awarded with the medal.

Later this same year she had the pleasure of seeing Charles et Ella, a Louisiana novel, begin its run in Le Meschacébé on October 21, 1891. Tinker lists 1892 as the date, but the novel had finished its run by mid-January of

¹¹²L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 2.

¹¹³An attorney in New Orleans. He was on a first name basis with her and used the tu form.

that year.¹¹⁴ It also appeared in one volume after being serialized.

In late May or early June of 1892, Amis et fortune started as a serial in Le Meschacébé. Publication in one volume came the following year.

Almost contemporaneous with the serialization of Amis et fortune came an encouraging letter from Emile Zola. In this letter dated May 4, 1892, Zola urged her to send her manuscripts to the publisher Charpentier. He also counseled patience. Unfortunately, there is no record of the letter or letters she wrote to him. The little information that we have about this letter comes from Swann Galleries, Inc., a New York auction firm.¹¹⁵ All efforts to trace this letter have proved futile.

In November, 1892, Charles Lasseigne of Le Meschacébé wrote to Mme de la Houssaye about publication of the Quartette series. It was originally agreed not to publish the series en feuilleton, as this would slow publication of the book. Octavia was, therefore, scheduled to appear only as a bound book. Then would come Violetta, Gina (possibly in two

¹¹⁴Tinker, op. cit., p. 112.

¹¹⁵Vide, catalog of Swann Auction Sale 448 (November 29, 1956).

volumes), and finally Dahlia.¹¹⁶ The following month Lasseigne acknowledged the arrival of the Gina manuscript and added that there was no rush for Dahlia, as he had not read Gina. It is interesting to note that at this point she had still not decided on her nom de plume for the series.¹¹⁷ Eventually she chose Louise Raymond. She had written Cable in April, 1889, that Louise Raymond was her nom de plume. No work, however, save the Quarteronne series, bears this name. This could mean that there are more lost works than we realize. It could also mean that she was not prepared to sign her name to anything controversial after her unfortunate experience in 1887.

Her last months on earth were a trial as nearly all her adult life had been. Lasseigne extended his sympathy in a letter dated September 9, 1893:

Je suis vraiment peiné d'apprendre les nombreux tourments qui vous affligent, mais c'est là le lot réservé aux grand-parents et qu'il faut bien subir avec resignation, d'autant plus que ce sont des choses qui ne dépendent que de la Providence et dont nul ne peut se croire exempt.¹¹⁸

Lasseigne published Octavia in 1894. Violetta, the

¹¹⁶Cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 180.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

second part of the series, was started en feuilleton in August, 1894 after the author's death. It appeared as a book in 1895. In February, 1895, Gina started in feuilleton and ran well into the fall of 1897, which must be something of a record for this type of novel. Dahlia started in the spring of 1897 and ran until July 30, 1898.

Her last illness must have been of very short duration. It was only on the day of her death that New Orleans learned of her condition from a brief notice in the out-of-town society section: "Mrs. Sidonie de la Houssaye has been very ill at the home of her grandson, Mr. Lawrence B. Tarlton."¹¹⁹ She died that very evening at six-thirty. Word reached New Orleans the following day, but it was a week before a more formal notice was received:

With the falling of evening's shades on the 18th instant the spirit of Mrs. Sidonie Delahoussaye ended its earthly pilgrimage and she was called home to rest. The funeral took place Monday afternoon from the Catholic Church, Rev. Father Bré performing the services. A large number of relatives and friends were present. Mrs. Delahoussaye leaves two sons, Mr. Arthur Delahoussaye of this place, and Capt. L. P. Delahoussaye, of New Orleans; a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to mourn her loss. She was a woman possessed of intelligence in a high degree; was for a number of years principal of a large and flourishing academy in Franklin, at which pupils from all over the parish were in attendance, and she devoted much time to writing for periodicals and magazines. The

¹¹⁹Times-Democrat (New Orleans), February 18, 1894.

record of her seventy-three years is a standing monument to the fact that she was one of God's creatures who had not lived in vain. . . .¹²⁰

Conspicuously absent from the services, according to witnesses, was her son, the captain. She was buried in the Tarlton plot in the Franklin cemetery. A modest granite headstone reads: "Mrs. Sidonie de la Houssaye, 1840-1894. French Authoress."

¹²⁰Times-Democrat (New Orleans), February 25, 1894.

CHAPTER II

BUSINESS AND LITERARY ASPECTS OF THE
CABLE-DE LA HOUSSAYE RELATIONSHIP

Cable Criticism

The Cable-Creole controversy has been the subject of numerous studies. Turner,¹ Butcher,² and Ekström,³ three leading Cable scholars, devoted considerable space to the problem in their respective books. Of the three, the last named has the most comprehensive and best developed treatment. All share a pro-Cable bias, which is understandable. Cable criticism, like Rousseau criticism, is often unreasonably partisan. His contemporary Louisiana critics were almost universally hostile; later critics tend to side with him. To call his early opponents critics is a misnomer. Most confined themselves to scurrilous invective and incoherent outbursts

¹Turner, op. cit.

²Philip Butcher, George W. Cable (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962).

³Kjell Ekström, George Washington Cable (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950).

produced in paroxysms of rage. None saw fit to attack his genuinely vulnerable points--viz., his French, his lapses in history, his blind religious prejudice, and his superficial acquaintance with local customs.

Cable's "Anti-Creole Bias"

Interesting as this subject may be, it is only of secondary concern to us. One must have, however, some knowledge of the animosity that existed between the Creoles and Cable in order to understand the latter's association with our author.

The reasons why the Creoles took umbrage can easily be gleaned from Cable's work. His Creole is indolent, anti-intellectual, superstitious, anti-progressive, anti-American, racist, and unblessed by Anglo-Saxon morality. His antipode, as Cable would say, is quite naturally an English-speaking person of Anglo Saxon extraction whose only aim seems to be enlightenment for Louisiana--that abyss of unenlightenment.

The short story "Madame Délicieuse" in Old Creole Days has many of the stereotypes.⁴ An intelligent doctor is scorned by his pompous father, who represents the narrow

⁴George W. Cable, Old Creole Days (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).

military mentality as further confined by Creole anti-Americanism. Dr. Mossy is generous, courageous, and intelligent. His father, General Villivicencio, is a veteran of the War of 1812. He is campaigning (the office is not named) against Americans, the English language, and anything that smacks of progress or change. A widow, Madame Délicieuse, is loved by both men. In the end, Dr. Mossy is reconciled with his father, and he will finally marry Madame Délicieuse to whom he has been betrothed for ten years. Disinherited and unreconciled with his father, he would not have married her. Dr. Mossy was little known in spite of his virtues, because he did not comport himself pretentiously enough to catch the Creole eye:

. . . a man, all in all, such as should you once love him, you would love him forever. So very learned, too, but with apparently no idea of how to show himself (*italics in text*) to his social profit,--two features much more smiled at than respected, not to say admired, by a people remote from the seats of learning, and spending most of their esteem upon animal heroisms and exterior display.⁵

His description of Madame Délicieuse was the occasion of one of Cable's most bigoted attacks on Catholicism: "But, mark you, she was good Madame Délicieuse as well as fair Madame Délicieuse: her principles, however, not constructed in the austere Anglo-Saxon style, exactly (what need, with

⁵Ibid., p. 272.

the lattice of the confessional not a stone's-throw off?)⁶

His prejudice was surpassed only by his ignorance in this particular case. His biographers and critics usually note this page, but none has noted another page that never saw print in the author's work. This unpublished passage comes from the notebook he carried in the Acadian country in 1880-81. He had been commissioned to gather information on New Orleans and the Acadian country for the 1880 census. He left New Orleans for southwest Louisiana on November 12, 1880.⁷

The fruit of his labor is seen in a notebook now in the Cable Collection at Tulane University. One finds data on the history of New Orleans, speeches on prison reform, data for the three stories comprising Bonaventure, a map of Grande Pointe (drawn by Cable), regionalisms of the Acadians, and finally a list of questions to be answered. The questions are damning because of the chronology involved. Old Creole Days was published in 1879. His 1880-81 notebook proves that his slur on the practice of confession was based on ignorance as well as prejudice. A sampling of his questions to be answered is indicative of his overall knowledge:

⁶Ibid., p. 273.

⁷Turner, op. cit., p. 109.

Does the priest have some prayer or other preparation before sitting in the Confessional?

Does not the priest have some form of blessing to give in the Confessional?

Would one go at once to confession on entering the Church?⁸

As though fearful his readers might miss the point, he added another attack on "Latin morals." The citizens of New Orleans were anticipating the fruits of General Villavicencio's victory in the election: "There was to be a happy renaissance; a purging out of Yankee ideas; a blessed home-coming of those good old Bourbon morals and manners which Yankee notions had expatriated."⁹

To convey the Creole's anti-intellectualism, Cable said this of Madame Délicieuse: "She had charms, too, of the intellect-albeit not such a sinner against time and place as to be an 'educated woman' . . ."¹⁰

The Creole's hedonism to the exclusion of loftier pursuits is evident in this passage apropos of Dr. Mossy's lack of social standing. "Here in Royal Street, in New Orleans, where we people know nothing and care nothing but for meat,

⁸Tulane Library, William Beer Cable Collection, Acadian Notebook, p. 111.

⁹Cable, Old Creole Days, p. 284.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 274.

drink, and pleasure, he was only Dr. Mossy, who gave pills."¹¹

The Grandissimes, a full length novel, appeared in 1880.

The author did not deviate from his pattern. The Creole is still lazy, prejudiced, anti-intellectual, and anti-progressive. It should be noted that new stress was also placed on his inhumane qualities and his attachment to superstition. The pompous family name Grandissime is not unworthy of the best French satiric tradition. There are two men bearing the name Honoré Grandissime. One is white and is the businessman of the family. He is also the most liberal and enlightened member of the family. The other, his half-brother, is a quadroon free man of color, usually referred to as "Honoré, f.m.c." (free man of color). He is a rentier, and both were educated in Paris. Upon returning to Louisiana, they maintained the distant relationship dictated by local custom. The white Honoré administered the estate of M. Nancanou, whom his uncle, the caricatured Agricola Fuselier, had killed in a duel. Agricola had won M. Nancanou's money at cards, and the latter had challenged him. The duel deprived the lovely Aurore De Grapion Nancanou of her husband and of her estate in one instant. As the story opens, she is about thirty-five, but looks scarcely older than her eighteen-year-old daughter, Clotilde. Honoré is hopelessly in love

¹¹Ibid., p. 298.

with her, but his position as family banker would seem to preclude any overtures to this unfortunate woman who is regarded as an enemy because of her late husband. Her own pride is also a formidable barrier between them. Eventually the barriers fall. Honoré, to the dismay of his family, turns over her late husband's estate to Aurore Nancanou. The Grandissime empire starts to show signs of distress. At this point, Honoré, f.m.c., offers his support on the condition that the business interest be called "Grandissime Brothers." The white Honoré agrees, notwithstanding the consternation of his family. Honoré, f.m.c., a symbol of the freedman who is not really free, is hopelessly in love with the quadroon freedwoman, Palmyre Philosophe, former maid of Aurore Nancanou. This unrequited love drives him to suicide. Palmyre practices the voodoo rituals. The elderly Agricola Fuselier is an object of her especial enmity, for, among other things, he had suggested that she be given as bride to the legendary slave Bras-Coupé. Clémence, her less sophisticated confederate, was caught while trying to deliver voodoo charms directed against Agricola Fuselier. Clémence was shot in the back after she had been told that she would not be hanged as the lynch mob had originally intended. Bras-Coupé, the giant slave, did marry Palmyre, but he became drunk on his wedding day and struck his master. He immediately fled to the swamps

and remained free for some time. He was eventually caught and punished so severely that he died. Cable took great pains to prepare his readers for this digressive episode, because Bras-Coupé was a symbol of the maiming effect of all slavery.¹² (For the true story of Bras-Coupé v. Castellanos, pp. 210-16.)¹³ Palmyre for her part loved the white Honoré, but in vain. Representing enlightenment and the sterner moral fibre of the Anglo-Saxon, was Joseph Frowenfeld, whose immigrant parents had died in New Orleans after leaving some unidentified northern community. Joseph's apothecary flourished until his liberal views incurred the wrath of the Creoles, who sacked his store. He reopened with a Creole partner. Clotilde Nancanou accepted him at the end of the novel. These are the main threads that run through this rambling and often confusing work.

That Cable had not abandoned his anti-Creole diatribe is evident. In a typical display of ethnocentrism he feels compelled to anglicize Aurore's name for the sake of euphony. "As Aurora--it sounds so much pleasanter to anglicize her

¹²George W. Cable, The Grandissimes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 88.

¹³Henry C. Castellanos, New Orleans As It Was. 2d ed. (Reprinted) New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1961. (First published in 1905: New Orleans, L. Graham Co. Ltd.)

name . . ."¹⁴

Cable believes that the Creole will never achieve anything in the arts; he lacks the drive to persevere. Joseph Frowenfeld commented on this weakness:

. . . the bane of all Creole art-effort, so far as I have seen, is amateurism.

.
'That is to say,' said Frowenfeld, apologizing for the homeliness of his further explanation by a smile, 'a kind of ambitious indolence that lays very large eggs, but can neither see the necessity for building a nest beforehand, nor command the patience to hatch the eggs afterward.'¹⁵

Frowenfeld's features betrayed the singular effects of too much mental effort--an unheard of phenomenon in that city: "His blue eyes . . . are noticeable, too, as betraying fatigue, and the shade of gravity in them is deepened by a certain worn look of excess--in books; a most unusual look in New Orleans in those days."¹⁶

Anti-Catholic prejudice rears its head as usual. In the following incident, which takes place after Bras-Coupé's flight to freedom, the priest urges the use of the whip to make Palmyre expose the runaway's hiding place, and Cable

¹⁴Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 98.

suggest that the whip and the Roman Church were both to be avoided, even by slaves:

'Ah!' said the jovial divine, with a fat smile, 'castigation would help her case; the whip is a great sanctifier, I fancy it would even make a Christian of the inexpugnable Bras-Coupé.'

But Bras-Coupé kept beyond the reach alike of the lash and of the Latin Bible.¹⁷

Cable, whose weakness in history was to embarrass him after the publication of his Strange True Stories of Louisiana, opened this novel with an historical mistake: "It was in the Théâtre St. Philippe . . . in the month of September, and in the year 1803."¹⁸ The Théâtre St. Philippe was built in 1810.¹⁹

An extended treatment of this subject is not necessary at this point. It is hoped that enough has been given to show why the Creoles had grievances. Anyone desirous of pursuing this topic would do well to read Ekström's excellent summary of Cable's libelous work, The Creoles of Louisiana.²⁰

It would not be amiss to make two points after citing

¹⁷Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁹Albert E. Fossier, New Orleans: The Glamor Period, 1800-1840 (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1957), p. 469.

²⁰Ekström, op. cit., pp. 143-53.

Cable on the Creoles. The first is that Cable was a consummate liar. The charge is harsh, but it can easily be proven, as will be shown. The second point is that he was a polemicist. His work was admittedly burdened by thesis: "I meant to make The Grandissimes as truly a political work as it has ever been called."²¹

Cable's lies ranged from bold-faced to simple mental reservations. Of the former type, two examples cited by Butcher are given.

As a young reporter in New Orleans he tried to sell the publisher Charles Scribner a collection of his articles from the Picayune. In a letter dated October 17, 1871 and now in the Scribner archives, he promoted himself to associate editor of the Picayune in order to enhance his position: "The manuscript was rejected, even though Cable offered to defray the cost of publication and asserted, persuasively but it seems inaccurately, that he had been associate editor of the paper."²²

²¹Lucy Leffingwell Cable Biklé, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 55.

²²Philip Butcher, George W. Cable: The Northampton Years (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 7.

Following publication in Scribner's Monthly of "'Tite Poulette" in October, 1874 and "Jean-ah Poquelin" in May, 1875, he was attacked in the Boston Literary World on the authenticity of the dialect in these stories. He wrote a letter to the Boston editor, but he asked it to be kept confidential. He hoped that the editor would make some defense for him and refute the unfounded charges. Not content with this most irregular overture, he falsely stated: "Though it does not absolutely prove anything I will add that I am a creole [sic] myself, living today in sight of the house where I was born." Butcher commented: "This letter enjoining a correspondent to secrecy and resorting to a convenient falsification, unimportant in itself, sets a precedent not without significance."²³

This same critic also noted that Cable occasionally ended his stories on an ambiguous note. This equivocal position was compatible with the man:

Cable told one of his daughters who asked if he would answer a question truthfully, 'No. But I will promise not to lie to you.' She took this as evidence of her father's absolute devotion to truth, an interpretation of dubious validity.²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴Butcher, George W. Cable, p. 44.

This background has been given in lieu of the emotional outbursts that are so generally cited by the Creoles as "proof" that Cable was wrong.

One attack by L. Placide Canonge in L'Abeille bears mention. In a July 19, 1884 letter, Madame de la Houssaye brought this article to Cable's attention. Canonge started his July 12, 1884 article, entitled "Paul Morphy," as a normal eulogy of the chess prodigy, who had died two days before. The Creole editor soon abandoned Paul Morphy for an entertaining, albeit thoroughly irrational, broadside against Cable. The article is not as widely known, and it bears analysis here as the epitome of the Creole pique.

Canonge started his article with a general introduction on Paul Morphy (1837-1884) and finished his opening paragraph with a sentence to introduce his digression, which is a classic of invective:

Quel livre biographique à écrire pour un Louisianais, pour un Créole.

Pour un Créole surtout, car Paul Morphy était l'un des nôtres.

On le pouvait citer comme l'une des preuves éclatantes, vivantes des hautes aptitudes de cette population que taquent les épingles émoussées de M. Geo. Cable; ce faux-dévot, confit en préjugés, ce petit clerc jouant au docteur; qui coule toute pâte dans le même moule, le même gaufrier; qui décante ses eaux sales chez nous, et se vautre dans un ruisseau pour le plaisir d'éclabousser autrui.

Piètre topographe, il confond l'antichambre avec le salon et voudrait glisser en contrabande dans celui-ci ce qu'il a rencontré dans celle-là.

Cette population créole, richement partagée, moralement, intellectuellement parlant, a produit, dans des lignes diverses, bien des sujets éminents, dont M. Cable ne semble même pas soupçonner l'existence.

Oui, oui, cela est ainsi, mon bon et chaste M. Cable, je vous le dis en vérité. Poursuivez votre commerce, écrivaillez vos petits livres, ouvrez, tenez boutique de calomnies et d'énormités, mais notre modestie ne va pas jusqu'à vous prendre au sérieux.

Oui, cher et heureux collègue, heureux puisque la boutique produit le dollar, et que le dollar est roi; oui, avant de nous décocher vos citations françaises, il vous faut apprendre d'abord ce diable de Français, qui vous gêne et auquel vous infligez la plus douloureuse orthographe qui soit, quand vous vous risquez de vous en servir. Et gardez-en la conviction, malgré votre ton aussi comique qu'il est protecteur, malgré votre pente littéraire, ou plutôt à cause d'elle, beaucoup de ces Créoles, si mal menés par vous, en intention du moins, beaucoup de ceux-là, M. Cable, vous distancent de bien des encablures, en anglais comme en français; une fois de plus je vous le dis en vérité, mon Révérend.

Là-dessus, au revoir, en attendant que quelque jour je m'occupe de vous plus longuement.

Qu'on me pardonne de m'être arrêté une minute à ces puerilités grandissimes (italics in text); mais tout est dans tout. Peut-être cette incidence trouve-t-elle ici sa place, car l'homme supérieur, le Créole--old days or not--dont je ne puis plus aujourd'hui saluer que la tombe, avait une vive affection pour la Louisiane.²⁵

A normal closing compatible with the tone of eulogy followed.

²⁵L'Abeille (New Orleans), July 12, 1884.

Canonge spoke for most Creoles. Sidonie de la Houssaye was born a Creole, and she was the widow of a Creole. Cable was born in New Orleans of northern stock, and he never felt at home until he moved to New England. What was the bond between two persons of such disparate cultures? The answer unfolds in a surprisingly simple way in their business relationship. Cable needed her as much as she needed him--a fact she did not readily recognize. Doubtless, her belated recognition and feeling of being abused as well as used hastened the inevitable rupture.

Cable was writing pointedly didactic literature when he found himself much in demand as the leading commentator on the Creoles. This created problems, as he was, par excellence, the prophet without honor in his own country. Louisiana critics were almost as one in denouncing him, as we have seen. What he needed was a supporter from their ranks to allay the fears of northern critics and readers. He probably wrote off Louisiana readers as a lost cause. The beginning of the Cable-de la Houssaye correspondence in January, 1884, is almost exactly contemporaneous with his decision to move to New England, although the actual move was not effected until October, 1885.²⁶ A handful of Louisiana readers was one thing,

²⁶Turner, op. cit., p. 223.

but he could not afford to lose his northern and eastern public. Adverse publicity and ridicule would do him no good. The cloud of suspicion must not hover over his work, especially since he had many other Louisiana subjects in mind. At the time he was actively negotiating for manuscripts for his Strange True Stories of Louisiana, and he had already collected material in 1880-81 for Bonaventure. The publication of both series in the last half of the decade would have been jeopardized, if not actually cancelled, had Cable become an object of ridicule.

Cable, whose Creole friends were extremely few in number, sought to foster the illusion that he was accepted among them. He even lied and claimed to be a Creole, as has been noted. Ekström actually thought it necessary to cite seven or eight cases in which Creoles praised Cable.²⁷ Most of his extollers were anonymous, and only one (Toledano) was recognizable as a Creole. Alcée Fortier related an incident that occurred when Cable asked the venerable historian, Charles Gayarré, to review one of his books. Gayarré replied that he would be happy to comply on one condition: "Name to me three Creole families of standing to whose homes you have had access. And Mr. Cable could not name one!"²⁸

²⁷ Ekström, op. cit., p. 171.

²⁸ Times-Democrat (New Orleans), August 3, 1891.

Far more damning is the report by the noted American illustrator, Joseph Pennell (1857-1926), who was commissioned to work with Cable on the Creoles of Louisiana, which appeared in 1884. The artist, upon his arrival in New Orleans in January, 1882, was struck by Cable's utter exclusion from respectable Creole society. According to Butcher:

Pennell was enchanted by Cable's New Orleans, half of it Creole and half American. . . . His only disappointment was that the author, whom he regarded as the only American who knew the Creoles, was so roundly hated that he could not present his visitor to Creoles of the better class.²⁹

Pennell had quickly grasped Cable's unenviable social position in New Orleans. We have tried to show that this position was not unmerited. Cable's worst fault was his lack of dedication to the truth. His lack of rapport with the Creoles came from his inability to appreciate any but Anglo-Saxon and Protestant values.

Mme de la Houssaye's Role

That Cable needed a Creole ally is beyond question. Who could better serve his purposes than a Creole with some reputation? To find such a person would be admittedly almost impossible. Dr. Alfred Mercier would be cited on occasion,

²⁹ George W. Cable, p. 62.

but he was not the type to be manipulated. Moreover, it is not likely that Cable knew Dr. Mercier. In an April, 1886 article for Century Magazine, Cable confused him with his brother, Dr. Armand Mercier, and wrongly cited the latter as author of a booklet on Creole patois.³⁰ Dr. Armand Mercier (1812-1885), first president of L'Athénée Louisianais, was well-known locally, but his interests were more scientific than literary. Gayarré, who had been friendly to Cable over a period of years, attacked him in a series of newspaper articles in the summer of 1883. The historian commented rather pointedly that a novelist using history was not to be equated with an historian.³¹ Alcée Fortier likewise was never known to be favorably inclined toward Cable.

As though by magic, an authentic Creole with literary talent, did appear on the scene. She not only appeared, but she offered to help Cable. It should be recalled that Cable had not approached her in his own name. He had bought two manuscripts that were actually sold to his agent, James B. Guthrie, who then signed them over to Cable. Unaware of Cable's modus operandi, Madame de la Houssaye sought him out

³⁰George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, XXXI (April, 1886), 819.

³¹Turner, op. cit., p. 201.

in New Orleans and showed him some of her manuscripts in the hope that he would use his influence to promote her career.³² She approached Cable under the illusion that he was not familiar with her work. He did not dispel that illusion or allude to the role of Mr. Guthrie.

Cable must have written her almost immediately upon his return to the East, as she thanked him for a letter in her first letter to him, dated January 18, 1884. Her intentions were manifest from the beginning:

Un homme de votre talent et de votre réputation, qui est sans cesse occupé, a besoin d'un bon nombre d'agents, et faut-il l'avouer? je caressais l'espérance de pouvoir vous servir d'une manière permanente. J'ai tant de manuscrits en mains dont le fond se base sur des faits véritables! Tant de notes qui pourraient vous être utiles! Je me soumettrais entièrement à vos instructions, ne demandant que les moyens de soutenir ma famille. Alexandre Dumas, d'heureuse mémoire, employait continuellement une dizaine de secrétaires qui inventaient les sujets pour lui, de là, la quantité d'ouvrages qu'il a écrits.³³

Here was a Creole with a name, materials, and a desire to work for him. Being in financial distress, she would be cheap--a fact that he would not be likely to overlook. He was loath

³²At the time of their first meeting in December, 1883-January, 1884, Cable had Old Creole Days (1879), The Grand-issimes (1880), and Madame Delphine (1881) in print.

³³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 18, 1884.

to part with his own money for business expenditures, as his Acadian notebook attests. Every nickel and dime for "carrying my valise" was noted. His stern Puritan morality did not include himself. Starting with The Grandissimes, he made excessive use of advances from his publisher: "Cable drew a \$500 advance when the revised early chapters were approved in March of 1879, a precedent he was to rely on--or to abuse--for the rest of his life."³⁴

A brief summary of the stories Cable bought from our author is necessary in order to follow the ensuing complications. These complications were never satisfactorily eliminated. They became a source of acute embarrassment to both writers and were, no doubt, among the causes of their eventual estrangement. Even before he entered direct communication with her, an aura of suspicion and distrust permeated the de la Houssaye-Guthrie correspondence.

In fact suspicion and distrust characterized the whole relationship. Neither party had an unshakable attachment to the truth. Cable's flagrant lying has been noted. Fairness demands that this same indictment include his correspondent. Her efforts as a prevaricator were truly as noteworthy as his.

³⁴Butcher, George W. Cable, p. 59.

It is only in the area of duplicity that he shows himself a more astute practitioner. He would praise her efforts in his letters to her and then disparage these same works in his letters to Mr. Charles Scribner. He unquestionably prejudiced that publisher against her. On the other hand, there is no recorded instance of her having belittled Cable's name or works. When it was fashionable among Creoles to excoriate Cable, she did not do so. She suffered many insults as "Cable's friend." Her motives were not entirely altruistic, as we know, but her behavior proves that her notions of honor were a little more cultivated than those of her hypocritical friend. It should not be construed that she had no criticism of Cable; for she did. She would not, however, betray confidences as he was wont to do.

Through Cable the public knew her in a dual role. She was his source and his expert on Creole and Acadian lore. When the occasion demanded, she was also a convenient excuse for inaccuracies and discrepancies that Cable did not detect in the stories he bought. He did not hesitate to sacrifice her to spare himself embarrassment.

By contrast, her criticism was straightforward, unequivocal, and--private.³⁵ Had she chosen to do so, she could

³⁵It must be assumed that a fear of alienating Cable tempered her criticism. Understatement would logically prevail.

have completely discredited him in the eyes of his public. He valued her comments and found her indispensable to his purposes. If she had chosen to divulge her observations on his French (Creole and Acadian) and lack of background for his undertaking, she would have unnerved his staunchest supporters.

In her letters one finds the feuilleton technique in its ultimate refinement. If Cable was devious, she was dilatory. No letter, with very rare exceptions, offered a satisfactory solution to any problem; it was her way of insuring Cable's continued interest. If he asked her to prove that a character was historical, she would reply that she could easily prove it, but asked why he wanted to know. The question, of course, remained unanswered. If pressed further, she claimed to be researching the problem. When a solution appeared imminent, obstacles invariably materialized. Two were suggested with disconcerting frequency. Witnesses (often reputedly centenarians!) died with alarming regularity. Fires took an incredible toll of written records. Short of calling her a liar, Cable had no recourse when confronted with one of these routine explanations.

Debaters often parry a question with another one. This technique was familiar to her. The irrelevant response, however, was more generally used by her. Unable to furnish pertinent information, she would often prevaricate. A typical

example of this evasive tactic has already been cited. Asked if her grandmother were still living in 1836, she replied that her grandmother had remarried late in life. The question remained unanswered.

With this insight a reader can more readily follow the often confusing drift of their correspondence.

The Cable-de la Houssaye Correspondence

As indicated earlier, the correspondence grew out of Guthrie's purchase of two manuscripts for Cable. Problems of verification and accuracy date from this period of July, 1883. Sidonie de la Houssaye sought Cable's recommendation in their meeting in December, 1883 or January, 1884. There was no mention of the two manuscripts in her first letter after the meeting. She was unaware of Guthrie's role, and Cable did not tell her that he was the actual buyer. After all, a story sold to George W. Cable would command a higher price than one sold to an obscure attorney. That he did not tell her in a face to face conversation that he had bought her manuscripts appears almost unbelievable to us. Yet, it was consistent with his business practices.

In February, 1884, she learned that Cable, not Guthrie, was the purchaser of her manuscripts. She confronted the

author with this bit of intelligence and suggested that he dispense with his agent in future dealings.³⁶

There is no record or statement to the effect that Cable bought more than two stories from our author. The charge that he stole material from her is persistent in Louisiana. It should be relegated to the domain of folklore, as it is without the slightest shred of supporting evidence. There is, in fact, evidence that she gave a manuscript to Cable. The letter translated almost verbatim in "The Young Aunt with White Hair" appears to have been a gift.³⁷ A brief memorandum in our author's hand is attached to this letter, but there are no transfer of ownership papers as there are for the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" and the "Alix de Morainville" manuscripts. Exactly when he acquired this letter is not clear, but it must date from the period at which he bought the other two items. She never mentioned the letter in her correspondence. Little importance was attached to some of the manuscripts attributed to her grandmother. Her evaluation of them is revealing. Shortly before selling the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" she wrote: "J'ai en mains une quinzaine de manuscrits presque

³⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, February 19, 1884.

³⁷Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 23.

tous meilleurs que Le Voyage de ma grand'mère . . . entr'autres l'histoire d'Alix de Morainville."³⁸ In a letter in the September, 1889 Century Magazine, Cable implied that the letter was a gift. ". . . this lady, though a person of literary tastes and talent, who recognized the literary value of Alix's history (Italics in text) esteemed original documents so lightly as to put no value upon Louisa Cheval's thrilling letter."³⁹

The irony is that these narratives which she valued so lightly reached a far greater audience than her preferred works. Guthrie paid \$100.00 on July 11, 1883 for the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" and \$16.50 on October 31, 1883 for "Alix de Morainville."⁴⁰ In her January 16, 1887 column, Catherine Cole of the Daily Picayune suggested that Cable had offered more money than L'Abeille for the "Voyage de ma grand'mère." Actually, L'Abeille sold it for what it had cost--\$100.00. Cable's offer seemed more advantageous in that it promised

³⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye to James B. Guthrie, June 27, 1883.

³⁹George W. Cable, a letter in "Open Letters," "Strange True Stories of Louisiana," Century Magazine, XXXVIII (September, 1889), p. 798.

⁴⁰Original contracts in William Beer Cable Collection, Tulane University.

a wider circulation and association with an established writer. Our author certainly did not envision the notoriety that would ensue.

The letter she gave to Cable will be discussed first. It purports to be an account of an Indian massacre witnessed by a great-grandaunt of Sidonie.

Louisa Cheval, the great-grandaunt in question and an immigrant from Alsace, is a sister of Pierre Bossier who is a wealthy planter fifty miles upstream from New Orleans in St. James Parish. She, her husband, and an infant son left Strasbourg on May 10, 1782. She interrupted her account to apologize for the bad paper and her writing. Her condition compelled her to write while lying down. The English vessel on which they sailed was small, ill-equipped, and manned by drunkards. Conditions quickly deteriorated. They were even robbed by the crew. After many privations and days of terror, they sighted the Mississippi River. By this time the crew had been replaced by the passengers. The captain did not want to attempt the tricky upstream passage at night with such an inexperienced crew. Anchor was dropped near the mouth of the river. In the middle of the night, howling Indians boarded the ship and killed nearly all in sight. One man escaped and went for help. Three women were taken alive, the narrator

among them. She had fainted amid the slaughter and awoke to find herself tied to a stake. Her captors were cannibals. One examined her and without further ado sliced off a piece of buttock.⁴¹ She fainted again and regained consciousness when a rescue party arrived. The man who had fled at the first sign of attack reached Fort Latourette and brought back help. The narrator was then taken to the fort where she wrote the letter on August 5, 1782. She lived only three years after this mutilation à la Cunégonde. Our author's grandmother recalled the aunt vividly, although she was but six years old when the aunt died. The aunt's snowy white hair made her stand out in her generation.

The story seems dramatic and restrained in spite of the gory events described. Under closer examination it is not quite so attractive. Cable must have realized this, for he made almost no effort to authenticate it. He did admit that he could not find Fort Latourette.⁴² The lack of authentication and the fact that the letter was a gift and easily obtained eliminated it from his tedious preface in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

⁴¹Fesse was translated as "thigh" by Cable.

⁴²Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 22.

In appearance the letter presents four pages of coarse but sturdy paper. The ink is spreading as happens when a soft paper is used. The writing is now almost illegible and appears to have been traced over with a very fine pen to preserve the text. The French is stylistically good, grammatically correct, and compatible with the alleged date of composition.

Nothing else in this letter has a genuine ring. It appears to have been written with the public in mind. The following excerpt would be absurd in a letter from sister to brother: "Living on the frontier of France, we spoke German and French equally well; and when the sailors heard us, they, who spoke only English, swore at us, accused us of plotting against them and called us Saurkrouts."⁴³ Certainly her brother, who corresponded with her, was already aware of her linguistic abilities. A stranger could have assumed as much. Her remark was as studied as the labored theatrical dialogue that used to be necessary to acquaint the audience with the location of the action.

Cable could not find Fort Latourette; historians could not find it. Standard histories such as Martin's⁴⁴ and

⁴³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁴François-Xavier Martin, The History of Louisiana from the earliest period (2 Vols.; New Orleans: Lyman and Beardslee and A. T. Penniman & Co., 1827-29).

Gayarré's⁴⁵ do not mention it. No map or print, no matter how ancient, mentions it. University professors and local historians can offer no help. The episode must be dismissed as a literary hoax. There is no supporting evidence for this account, and the letter has the additional misfortune to be associated with two demonstrably spurious narratives.

The manuscripts bought by Cable were much longer. They were "Voyage de ma grand'mère" (151 pages in manuscript) and "Alix de Morainville" (68 pages in manuscript). Our author's grandmother was said to be the writer of the first. It purports to be the record of a barge trip in 1795 from New Orleans up the Mississippi River, down Bayou Plaquemine, and through Lake Chicot to Bayou Tèche and the Attakapas country. François Bossier ostensibly wrote this account in 1822 "to give pleasure to my dear daughter Fannie and to her children." The writer was sixteen at the time of the trip and her tomboyish sister Suzanne was eighteen.

The action opens with a highly imaginative description of New Orleans in 1795. Pierre Bossier meets his traveling companions in a dingy cabaret. They were Joseph Carpentier, a Norman peasant and gardener, a burly Irishman named John

⁴⁵Charles Gayarré, History of Louisiana (4 Vols.; 2d ed.; New Orleans: J. A. Gresham, 1879).

Gordon and a stereotyped Italian, Mario Carlo. Pierre Bossier had heard of the Italian, because he had worked for a relative of his. Mario's stories of a trip to the Attakapas country had made their way to Pierre Bossier who determined to visit this country so rich in game and fertile soil. The group that left New Orleans in mid-May, 1795, was comprised of: Pierre Bossier and his two daughters; John Gordon, his wife, and a son of twelve; Mario, his mulatto wife, and a boy of thirteen, and last on board, Joseph Carpentier and his delicate, elegantly attired wife Alix. The flatboat was loaded with all sorts of furnishings, and the group pushed off. They reached the Bossier plantation in St. James Parish several days after their departure. After a dinner with Madame Bossier, they set out again. At Plaquemine they entered Bayou Plaquemine, where they could float downstream for the first time. Indians lined the banks as they drifted past. The perils of the journey paled into insignificance when the Bossier girls learned that the gardener's wife was the daughter of a count and the widow of a viscount. A landing was made near Lake Chicot, where the group encountered a family living in a hovel. Inclement weather forced the travellers to spend the night in this hovel. They feared the worst and maintained a watch through the night. Nothing happened and they continued southward. After almost

two months they reached the location of present-day Patterson, or a spot roughly fifty miles from St. Martinville on Bayou Têche. The Carpentiers were captivated by an abandoned house in the area. Mr. Gerbeau, a plantation owner, told them the house was vacant and theirs for the taking. Mr. Gerbeau invited them to dinner. Talk turned to St. Martinville and its gay social life. Alix noted Countess de la Houssaye's name and said she was an old friend from Paris. The girls could hardly wait to reach St. Martinville, "the little Paris." They pushed westward past Franklin, Jeanerette, and New Iberia. They finally reached St. Martinville in July. It was noted that The Barber of Seville was being played that very night. One of Mr. Bossier's first tasks was the distribution of correspondence he had brought. The girls observed that many of the addressees were titled. A ball and other festivities enlivened their stay in St. Martinville. With many regrets they left and made their way eastward toward the Mississippi River and home. Alix and her husband left the party to take possession of the abandoned house they had noticed on their way to St. Martinville. Alix gave Françoise Bossier a small manuscript bound in blue ribbons as they parted.

"Alix de Morainville" was the manuscript given to Françoise Bossier. It was an autobiographical sketch recently

written for the girls. Alix was the long-awaited child of the Count and Countess de Morainville in Normandy. The Countess was one of the most attractive women in the service of the dauphine, Marie Antoinette. The couple's hopes were dashed when Alix was born prematurely and hunchbacked. The deformity was not great, but it was sufficient to alienate the parents. As a result the child spent most of its infancy in the care of the gardener's wife. Alix knew all of the Carpentiers including her future husband, Joseph. At the age of nine Alix was put in the care of a governess. Her mother had chosen a cousin to be her husband, and in her fourteenth year she was introduced to Abner de Morainville, a viscount. Their wedding took place in March, 1789, when she was sixteen. Shortly after the fall of the Bastille, Alix's mother fled to England. Their chateau was sacked, and her husband was torn from her and slain. Various members of the Carpentier family helped her live under an assumed identity. Her true identity was discovered, and she accepted a civil marriage to Joseph Carpentier as a means of avoiding persecution. This was to be a mere formality until they could reach England and safety. They did reach England, but Joseph was really in love with Alix and displeased with the situation. Despairing of really winning her hand, Joseph decided to go to America. Informed of his plans, Alix decided

to marry Joseph in a religious ceremony. Soon after they left for America. The "Voyage de ma grand'mère" picks up their story in America.

There were many problems concerning the historicity of these stories. Cable did detect some anachronisms in the manuscript, and he duly noted them when the stories first came out in Century Magazine. He informed the readers that the fall of the Bastille did not occur on July 13, 1789, as the author of "Alix de Morainville" had it.⁴⁶ A few lines after this obvious mistake was an anachronism that escaped him. Reference was made to the Bank of France that was founded in 1800 by Napoleon.⁴⁷ Our author should have blushed, too. She had already boasted to Cable of her knowledge of French history: "C'est singulier comme les Américains connaissent peu l'histoire de France, pour moi, elle m'est plus familière que celle des E.U."⁴⁸

Before turning to the "Voyage de ma grand'mère," we should note several facts about the "Alix de Morainville"

⁴⁶George W. Cable, "The History of Alix de Morainville," Century Magazine, XXXVII (March, 1889), 745.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1887.

manuscript which is in the William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University. The manuscript is much smaller than the majority of those left by our author. It measures only five by nine inches. Three blue ribbons bind it much as the rings do in a conventional loose-leaf binder. The paper is good and the writing which is not that of Mme de la Houssaye is quite legible. The manuscript shows definite evidence of tampering. Clumsy efforts to lend a suitably archaic air can easily be detected. Someone has written an "O" over the "A" in the endings of the imperfect indicative. On page five, *avait* > *avoit*; on page seven, *voulaient* > *vouloient*, etc. Madame de la Houssaye must be charged with the fabrication of this story. There are too many flattering references to her husband's family for the work to be attributed to another person. The historical errors in the text are the ones she consistently made. The fall of the Bastille on July 13, 1789, for example, is found in her reconstruction of the Alix story in her unfinished "Redoutables" written as a sequel to the stories sold to Cable.⁴⁹

Cable thought he had found a face-saving expedient and he brought it to the public's attention in the September 1889 Century Magazine letter that we have already noted. The

⁴⁹L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 19, p. 45.

anachronisms were sufficient to rule out the writer as a participant in the events described, but did Alix really write all of the story? The reference in "Voyage de ma grand'mère" to the last minute gift of the manuscript to Françoise Bossier was a gloss. Cable's Creole friend admitted that it was hers. The story, then, had not come directly into Françoise Bossier's hands. It first went to the Mr. Gerbeau mentioned in the story and stayed at least two years in his hands. Mr. Gerbeau should be blamed for any inaccuracies in the text. If he did not personally insert the inaccurate references, the person charged by him to copy the manuscript did so. Cable suggested that some Creole with ancestral pride simply inserted the allusions to his ancestors.⁵⁰ The allusions so obviously embellishing one family name must be charged to our author.

Other factors must be considered. The evidence for attributing the inaccuracies to Mr. Gerbeau is patently "manufactured." Our author sent Cable a statement by a "gentleman of h i g h s t a n d i n g" (as she wrote it) that in his presence she removed from an ancient trunk all sorts of authentic looking papers and documents. One such paper was a journal entry made in June, 1841. It alluded to a visit by Mr. Gerbeau and his statement that he had kept the story of

⁵⁰Cable, Open Letters, p. 799.

Alix for two years before forwarding it to the girls. Cable presented this as irrefutable evidence that the story was genuine.⁵¹ What is interesting is the sudden appearance of corroborating evidence after almost six years. On July 1, 1883, Madame de la Houssaye told Mr. Guthrie that she had no letters from Mr. Gerbeau. She did not allude to her diary then.⁵² The journal she claimed to have kept seems to have been invented for the occasion: "Je vous ai dit, n'est-ce pas,⁵³ que j'avais contracté l'habitude de ma grand'mère d'écrire mes sentiments, mes pensées et de plus les évènements de tous les jours."⁵⁴ She had not done so, and there is no other reference to this most convenient practice. Had she been so meticulous a recorder of events, she would not have had the trouble she did in trying to substantiate her statements. A remark about her witness of "high standing" is in order. He was Placide P. Sigur, a representative in the state legislature. As a postscript to his statement, she wrote:

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye to James B. Guthrie, July 1, 1883.

⁵³A formula occasionally used when she needed to introduce new material toward the end of her stories.

⁵⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1889. (Incorrectly cited as April 10, 1889 by Cable.)

"En présence de M. Placide P. Sigur, je corrige la fin de mon nom qu'il a écrit de la Houssay comme font les étrangers."

This man who had misspelled her name had married her granddaughter Mary, the daughter of her son Arthur.

Errors in the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" are numerous. Anachronisms abound and verisimilitude is almost totally absent from the descriptions. Our author was steadfast in attributing the essential facts of the story to her grandmother's notes and recollections. In her July 1, 1883 letter to Guthrie, already noted, she wrote, "Je vous donne ma parole que tout le manuscrit excepté quelques épisodes racontées par ma grand'mère, elle-même, a été copié d'après ses notes." Cable received some eight or nine pages purporting to be from the original version done by her grandmother, Françoise Bossier. A facsimile of a few lines of this supposedly original version is reproduced after page 34 in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.⁵⁵ The spelling is that of a semi-literate. A careful examination of the eight or nine pages of the original draft was revealing. It can be stated categorically that the writing was not that of Françoise Bossier.⁵⁶ Françoise Bossier, the author's grandmother, never spelled her name Bossier. She

⁵⁵Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 34.

⁵⁶Original documents in William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University.

always wrote Bossié in legal records dating from 1785 to 1825.⁵⁷
All members of her family did likewise.

Astonishing anachronisms appear at the very beginning of the narrative. The narrator gave her own age as sixteen and her sister Suzanne's as eighteen. As the trip was in 1795, it would mean that the girls were born in 1779 and 1777, respectively. Mark these dates. On July 1, 1785, Françoise Bossier, to use the now popular spelling, signed a marriage contract with François Daniel Pain.⁵⁸ She would have been six years old according to the chronology of the story. Suzanne Bossier married Alexis Perret on September 4, 1787.⁵⁹ She would have been ten years old following the same chronology. Other equally absurd statements follow. Mention is made of two Bossier boys--one two years old and one three months old. Ten years earlier, Pierre Bossier files and Georges Bossier had signed as witnesses at the marriage of their sister Suzanne.⁶⁰

Later in the action there was occasion to mention certain titled citizens in St. Martinville. Reference was made

⁵⁷Court records in St. John the Baptist Parish.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹St. John the Baptist Church, Edgard, Louisiana.

⁶⁰Ibid.

to a Claude de la Pellerier [sic] de la Houssaye, prime minister of Louis XV and ancestor of our author's husband. This is palpably absurd.⁶¹ It is strange that Cable did not seize this occasion to mock the Creole pretension to illustrious ancestry. It is possible that he was not sufficiently familiar with French history to detect such an error; otherwise, it can only be explained in the light of his not wanting to alienate his Creole friend. An exposé and public humiliation of this type would have been the final insult in their strained relationship.

An utter disregard for verisimilitude is shown in the costumes that were to be worn on the trip. Alix was wearing a silk hood trimmed with fur, and this was Louisiana in the second half of May.⁶²

This extended treatment was undertaken with two ends in mind. It should have demonstrated that Cable knew little history and that our author was given to altering history. She reiterated on many occasions that all was factual in

⁶¹Louis XV reached his majority in 1722. Cardinal Dubois was his first prime minister and served until his death in 1723. Philippe d'Orléans served from 1723-1726. Cardinal de Fleury served from 1726 until his death in 1743. After the death of Fleury, Louis XV ruled without a prime minister.

⁶²Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 49.

these stories. Cable accepted them, with some reservations, as true, and she defended them as such. Her use, or rather abuse, of history definitely disqualifies her as a serious commentator on the history or moeurs of a period. The Quarteronne series shares the same faults of distortion, half-truths, and "manufactured" history.

Aware of the problems in the two manuscripts that she sold Cable, we can approach their correspondence with more understanding.

In Madame de la Houssaye's second letter to Guthrie, she offered a character witness. It is not clear whether he requested it or not. It is not unlikely that she felt her manner of conducting business invited suspicion. She gave the name of Judge Albert Vorheis in St. Martinville as a reference.⁶³ Apparently there was still doubt or distrust in Guthrie's mind, for she added the name of a justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court in her next letter: "J'espérais que les témoignages du juge Vorheis et celui du Colonel Deblanc vous auraient suffi et que leur parole en ma faveur aurait fait accepter mon manuscrit."⁶⁴ She despaired of

⁶³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye to James B. Guthrie, June 24, 1883.

⁶⁴Ibid., June 27, 1883.

reaching an agreement when Guthrie deemed the word of two judges insufficient reference. In her July 1, 1883, letter already cited, she quoted Mme de Sevigne: " ... j'ajouterais ces quelques mots de Mme de Sévigné--En désespoir de cause de vous comprendre, je jette ma langue aux chiens."⁶⁵

Her very first letter to Cable shows that she had acquainted him with her work in their first meeting in New Orleans. She writes as though she had told him that she had sold the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" to Guthrie. (Cable evidently feigned ignorance of this work, as she was genuinely surprised to learn later that he, not Guthrie, was the real buyer.) She offered Cable a sequel to it.

J'ai en mains la véritable continuation du Voyage de ma grand'mère, c'est-à-dire, l'histoire d'une société secrète qui pendant des années, désola la paroisse Ste Marie et dont les descendants des Carpentier, Gordon, Carlo et autres dont il est question dans le voyage, sont les principaux acteurs--Les Redoutables, tel est le nom de ce nouvel ouvrage, est bien certainement ce que j'ai écrit de mieux et serait destiné à un grand succès, je n'en doute pas, s'il était traduit en anglais.⁶⁶

One month later she confronted Cable with a story she had heard:

⁶⁵Probably her version of, "Jetez-vous votre langue aux chiens?" in Mme de Sévigné's "Lettre à Monsieur de Coulanges," December 15, 1670.

⁶⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 18, 1884.

I do not know if I have been well informed, but I heard that the two manuscripts sold to Mr. Guthrie: "Le Voyage de ma grand'mère" and "Alix de Morainville," have been bought for you, Mr. Guthrie being only your agent. If this is true, let me ask you, Mr. Cable, to address all communications directly to me in the future in case you need my services. I will be so happy to work for you! I am descret [sic], diligent and prudent and I will only add this! Do try me!⁶⁷

She continued her campaign to sell "Les Redoutables."

"I can say without vanity that the third work ["Les Redoutables"] is highly superior to the two others."⁶⁸

In May she was still trying to have him read this work: "J'aimerais à vous faire lire les Redoutables qui dans mon humble opinion sont ce que j'ai mieux écrit jusqu'à présent."⁶⁹ She added that "Les Redoutables" remained unfinished.⁷⁰ This same letter contained some unusual proposals. She wrote that Guthrie had told her that if she were planning a sequel to the two stories he had bought, she could not even allude to them. It was her opinion that under French copyright law she could use "Les Redoutables" as a sequel. (We do not know if she tried to sell this work to a French

⁶⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, February 19, 1884.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, May 11, 1884.

⁷⁰It remained uncompleted at the time of her death.

publisher.) The sale of "Les Redoutables" to Cable would eliminate additional work for her (no new preface would be needed) and the threat of legal action by Cable in the event that she tried to publish it in France. If he did not choose to buy she could redo the story, changing names and adding a new prologue. "George Gérard" ("Gerard pour Gerbeau") was being written to serve this purpose. Cable never showed any interest in this sequel to the stories he had already bought.

She mentioned that she was going to try to copy some songs sung by an aged Negro.⁷¹ Professor Broussard was under the impression that she composed songs in the Negro patois, but she always spoke of collecting or copying them.⁷²

A letter dated July 6, 1884, contains the first of several observations that our author made on Cable's French. It is unfortunate that Cable scholars seem to be entirely unaware of this criticism. They generally refrain from evaluating this area of his background. Ekström hazarded a very tenuous defense of Cable's aptitude in French in a footnote:

Arnaud (op. cit., p. 8) writes that Mrs. Oechsner, Cable's niece, told him that Cable was able to speak

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Broussard, loc. cit., p. 6.

and understand French. To bear up this statement there is Cable's use of French phrases in his books, a Russian professor's statement that he heard Cable speak French to a Frenchman (see "My Acquaintance with Cable," Critic, July 28, 1883), and the fact that Cable refers to a large number of works in French in the footnotes of his MS of the History of New Orleans.⁷³

Madame de la Houssaye frankly expected to avail herself of her friendship with Cable. Her remarks would logically tend to be restrained and flattering.

Given this motivation, what did she say? Her observations were surprisingly critical, though friendly: "A thousand thanks for Mme Delphine. I like it much even [sic] your french [sic] is not exactly p u r e--it takes a whole life to speak such a language in form."⁷⁴ In his April, 1886, Century Magazine article, "Creole Slave Songs," we find this statement apropos of the Negro patois: "A Creole lady [our author] writes me almost as I write this, 'It takes a whole life to speak such a language in form.'"⁷⁵ He boasted of his friendship with a Creole lady and implied that his own command of the language was good. Wisely he deleted the first part of

⁷³Ekstrom, op. cit., p. 92 N.

⁷⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 6, 1884.

⁷⁵George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, XXXI (April, 1886), 807.

the sentence.

A July, 1884, letter alludes to the translation of an unnamed book for Cable. It was to be approximately three hundred pages long.⁷⁶ His terms seemed to make her remuneration contingent on the book's acceptance. She objected to such an arrangement: "Vous voulez que j'attende pour être payée le moment où votre livre sera accepté? mais s'il n'est pas accepté, il me faudra tout perdre? Cela est impossible."⁷⁷ She suggested that he pay one half on delivery of the translation and the remainder within three months. Satisfaction was guaranteed:

Je puis vous assurer que vous serez satisfait, de plus, je m'engage à corriger le français et le nègre [Negro patois] de votre livre. Avez vous lu l'Abeille du 16, au sujet de la mort de Paul Morphy? [The date was July 12, 1884.] Mr. Placide Canonge vous tape sévèrement, et se moque de votre français: (Entre nous, il a raison, votre français n'est pas toujours des plus purs.) Moi, je rectifierai tout cela.⁷⁸

In closing she offered her works to Cable in any way he saw fit to utilize them. "Je suis disposée à écrire

⁷⁶The Creoles of Louisiana, a compendium of anti-Creole lore published in 1884, would fit this description. It is not likely that she would have translated such a work--even for money.

⁷⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 19, 1884.

⁷⁸Ibid.

entièrement pour vous seul et si mes oeuvres vous conviennent, traduisez-les, mettez-y votre nom, pourvu que vous me les payiez d'un prix raisonnable qui puisse me faire vivre." A postscript note contained an offer to translate Madame Delphine, a short story of less than one hundred pages.⁷⁹ From time to time she asked for work as a translator, but he never offered anything in terms she could accept.

His next letter must have been disconcerting to her. She feared that there was a misunderstanding:

Certainly, when I received your last letter, I was under the impression that our correspondence had come to an end. . . . I do consider this message as one of some importance. I am certain that you understand the french [sic] language very well, in [sic] the same time, I noticed some times, that you did not give the real understanding [sic] to one word or another, and as I want to be perfectly understood, I decide [sic] to use my bad english [sic], hoping that you will be indulgent.

She had to reassure him that her refusal of his terms was not based on mistrust:

You were under the impression that I did not trust you when I refused to translate for you under the conditions you offered me then. Oh! how unjust [sic] you were! Nothing could make me prouder & happier than to take charge of your translations.

She went on to say that his arrangement was too uncertain and that she had to take work with a surer return, even

⁷⁹ Ibid.

if less remunerative. The offer to work for him was repeated:

I feel that I can be very useful to you. I have so many manuscripts relating old Creole stories. I am not young, it is true, but I am diligent, careful, and know that I can serve you. A. Dumas used to employ several persons to write for him.⁸⁰

Her efforts at peacemaking were unsuccessful, and she had to answer an obviously annoyed Cable:

Ma première impression en recevant votre lettre fut de n'y point répondre et de vous laisser penser de moi ce que bon vous semblerait; mais, une seconde pensée m'a fait comprendre que par respect pour moi-même, je ne devais pas porter le poids d'une injuste accusation. Je dirai seulement ceci, lorsque vos nombreuses occupations vous laissent libres quelques instants, les lettres que vous pourrez m'écrire alors seront toujours reçues avec le même plaisir. ... En écrivant en anglais, j'espérais être mieux comprise; il semblerait que je l'ai été moins encore.

She excused herself for intruding in Cable's business.

(She had generously offered to "take charge" of his translations.) Her statement of July 19, 1884 apropos of his using her work was obviously forgotten:

Vous ne m'avez certainement point comprise lorsque je vous ai offert d'écrire pour vous, citant Dumas, mal à propos peut-être.

Nous avons tous au coeur une pointe d'orgueil qui nous fait trouver nos oeuvres supérieures à celles de votre voisin et, bien certainement, ni vous ni moi ne faisons exception à cette règle; je ne consentirai jamais à voir une autre personne signer mes oeuvres de son nom, pas plus que vous accepteriez de mettre

⁸⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 17, 1884.

le vôtre aux oeuvres du voisin, trop inférieures aux vôtres. Mais voici ce que je vous ai offert: d'écrire pour vous comme secrétaire, comme traducteur, de mettre sous vos yeux de vieilles traditions, des légendes Créoles comme vous les aimez et que vous écrivez. Pour venir en aide à ma famille, je suis prête à mettre de côté réputation et honneur comme écrivain; si en consacrant mon temps et mon travail à un homme capable de les apprécier, je puis assurer le bien-être de mes enfants.

She added that local writers had spoiled her by treating her as a sister and that she was sorry to have imposed on his kindness. Offers to be of further assistance to him were proffered:

... je serais bien heureuse si l'occasion se présente un jour de vous être utile; vous connaissez le vieux proverbe:--'On a souvent besoin d'un plus petit que soi!'⁸¹

If she had only known how well Cable realized it! It was the main reason for the correspondence from his point of view. A postscript to this long letter tantalizes us: "En ce moment même, je lis vos Grandissimes. Et franchement: plus j'avance dans ma lecture, plus je suis étonnée d'une chose que je vous dirai peut-être un jour?"⁸² She never alluded to this novel again.

Almost a year later she complained of her poor memory when Cable asked for clarification on certain details in the

⁸¹Le Lion et le rat, La Fontaine, Fables II, xi.

⁸²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, October 4, 1884.

description of the ball in St. Martinville that our travelers spoke of in the "Voyage de ma grand'mère." She claimed to have a witness to corroborate the description as given in the manuscript: "Il y a en ce moment dans la paroisse St. Martin une vieille dame qui a plus de 110 ans et qui m'a assurée avoir assisté à ce bal où se trouvaient ma grand'mère et ma tante Suzanne."⁸³

In the same letter Cable was offered a new manuscript, "Chattanooga." It purported to be the account of an 1807 trip by her grandparents to the Indian healers in Chattanooga.

An example of the almost negligible information given to Cable is found in a late August letter: "Un garde-soleil est un sunbonnet et une résille a net."⁸⁴ That Cable should ask the meaning of such commonplace words speaks poorly of his ability in French.

The same letter shows how much Madame de la Houssaye treasured her correspondence in spite of the problems involved:

Soyez convaincu que si ma lettre vous a fait plaisir, les vôtres sont toujours pour moi une grande source de plaisir. Oui, vous avez raison, mon nom attaché à un ouvrage traduit par vous sera un honneur pour moi et probablement la cause d'un grand avantage

⁸³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 6, 1885.

⁸⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 23, 1885.

pour moi. Certainement que vous pouvez publier le nom de mon aïeul, Pierre Bossier, en plein.⁸⁵

Cable knew that our author realized she would benefit by association with him and he pointedly reminded her of it. The reference to the use of names belongs to the "Voyage de ma grand'mère," which was not published until 1888.

Without Cable's backing, she approached the publisher Charles Scribner in August, 1885. Later she would tell him what she had done and would solicit his support. In the following months Cable demonstrated his duplicity by simultaneously encouraging her while deprecating her and her writing at Scribner's.

She asked Cable to write a few words of recommendation to the publisher who already seemed favorably disposed toward her.⁸⁶ "Claire" and Octavie, a quarteronne story, were sent. A worse choice could hardly have been made. "Claire" treats of infidelity and of a mother saved by her daughter's sacrifice. The daughter compromised her own reputation to save her mother's. Octavie is a horrible tale of a spurned quarteronne's revenge. Octavie kidnapped her former lover's daughter and raised her in an atmosphere of debauchery. Years

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

later she would promote an incestuous relationship between this girl and her brother. These were a far cry from the anodyne plots of her puritanical friend.

An interesting allusion appears in this letter. It appears that our author was possibly the first person to appreciate the dramatic literary possibilities of the *Ile Dernière* tragedy in the 1856 hurricane. This large island lying in the Gulf of Mexico about forty miles west of Grand Isle and about sixty-five miles southwest of New Orleans was a fashionable resort much frequented by Louisiana planters. Wind and water reduced this populous resort to a sand bar between August 9th and 10th, 1856. The story was well-known among Louisianians; and even non-natives, such as Lafcadio Hearn, quickly became familiar with it. Hearn, who based his masterpiece Chita on this catastrophe, heard the story of the tragedy from Cable in 1883, but did not start his work until 1886.⁸⁷ Chita was published in 1889. Between 1883, when he heard the bare recital of a natural disaster and the beginning of his book in 1886, many things could have happened. Cable could have mentioned the ideas he gleaned from our author's letters. What is suggested here is simply a possibility.

⁸⁷Elizabeth Stevenson, Lafcadio Hearn (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 151.

She wrote in September, 1885 that she had some material on
Last Island:

J'ai encore comme scènes Louisianaises "La Destruction de la Dernière Ile" arrivée le 12 Août 1856. [Actually 9th-10th.] C'était un lieu de plaisir et d'amusement où 200 vies furent perdues! J'ai été partout chercher des informations, de vieilles notes--je vais mêler un peu d'amour à tout cela et je commencerai Lundi un nouveau roman pour Scribner s'il en veut!⁸⁸

There is no evidence that she ever pursued this topic.

Cable, on the other hand, evinced some interest and asked a few questions which she answered:

Non, je n'étais pas à la Dernière Ile, mais mes notes, tout mon récit, me viennent de plusieurs personnes qui étaient là, entr 'autres le docteur Dupérier de la N^{elle} Iberie qui a eu la chance de sauver la vie d'une riche héritière qu'il a épousée. Voilà du roman tout naturellement.⁸⁹

In this instance her literary appraisal was faultless.

Hearn's story has a doctor who loses his wife and child in the hurricane. He finds the child alive after many years, but he dies not realizing that he has found his own daughter.

The true story with the human interest as suggested by Madame de la Houssaye was precisely what Cable loved to exploit. He may have planned a story of his own on this

⁸⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

⁸⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 22, 1885.

subject. Tinker asserts that Cable accused Hearn of stealing his story for Chita.⁹⁰ Turner, however, believes Tinker's statement is based on oral tradition. He is inclined to reject it.⁹¹ Pending further proof, the similarity between Madame de la Houssaye's idea and Hearn's story possibly via Cable must remain an interesting coincidence.

"Claire" was already in Scribner's hands, but she was afraid that it was too long, and she sent Octavie. While she was trying to work out something suitable with Scribner, Cable lodged a new complaint. This time he accused her of altering her grandmother's narrative. She indignantly denied the charge:

Maintenant, je vous prie d'expliquer ce que vous voulez dire en disant que je cours de risques en changeant en romans les vieux man. de ma grand'mère. Je vous donne ma parole que je ne change rien, je traduis seulement. Ma grand'mère aimait beaucoup le romanesque et je lui ai entendu dire (et elle l'a écrit) qu'un peu d'amour dans un récit était le sel et le poivre de la sauce. Son orthographe est horrible et voilà pourquoi ma mère qui n'est pas romanesque du tout, ne veut pas laisser voir ce que sa mère a écrit.⁹²

By translating she meant correcting the poor grammar

⁹⁰Edward Larocque Tinker, Lafcadio Hearn's American Days (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1924), p. 197.

⁹¹Turner, op. cit., p. 235, N.

⁹²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 22, 1885.

and spelling (son orthographe est horrible"). Elsewhere she likened the grandmother's works to griffonage and hiéroglyphes. The remark about "un peu d'amour" attributed to her grandmother is hardly acceptable. She was less than eight years old when her grandmother died.

In this same letter she thanked Cable for recommending her to Mr. Scribner:

Je voudrais trouver des expressions capables de vous exprimer ma reconnaissance, non seulement pour la bonne recommandation que vous m'avez donnée près de Monsieur Scribner, mais aussi pour vos conseils. Si j'étais près de vous, je vous tendrais la main en disant: Merci, merci! mais du fond du coeur, je vous adresse ces paroles.⁹³

Mr. Scribner must have sent a polite note after receiving Cable's letter, as the recommendation the latter gave her was really no recommendation at all. He was simply seeing to his own interests and advising a very cautious attitude toward our author. If there were any doubts that he found his relationship to Madame de la Houssaye advantageous, the fourth paragraph of his letter should dispel them forever. Our author's presence in the ranks of Messrs. Cable and Scribner would disarm the Creole critics or anyone with the temerity to question the authenticity of Cable's stories:

⁹³Ibid.

Simsbury, Conn. Aug. 27, 1885

My dear Mr. Scribner:

I have told you of my prospected volume of true stories. I have just finished translating & condensing one of two MSS bought from Madame Sidonie Dela Houssaye of Franklin, Louisiana. Being in correspondence with her, she writes me that she is now very busy preparing at your request some Louisiana sketches.

Of course I understand how extremely urgent and importunate your request was. I suppose you have simply consented to look at her work with a view to publication if available. But I write to suggest that it might be well, before accepting any MSS from her, to know what relation it bears, if any, to what I have bought of her. The number of ancient MSS she is offering for sale is worthy of consideration.

Even if you do not find her MSS acceptable I should like to know what they are. I paid a large price for the principal MS of the two I bought of her, upon her statement--I think--I have not her letters now at hand--that they were old MSS and that she had no others. I think those that, she writes me, she has found since may be genuine, (not taking time now to explain my reasons for thinking so,) but it seems to me that a part of the value for which I have paid is that the earlier MSS should not be forestalled before the public by these later ones. Moreover, I think these later ones would be more valuable rather than less if they followed the successful appearance of those I am preparing for early publication.

The next paragraph is the key to Cable's interest in our author:

It seems to me there may be many ways in which the appearance of Madame Dela Houssaye's MSS may be of value to us as publisher & author of those works of mine whose correctness has been so fiercely denied by the Creoles; I mean O. C. Days, & the Grandissimes.

I should like to know that you have seen the original MS that she tells me she has just found in her "old chest," marked "Quarteronnes" and is translating for you.

I write hastily and must add that I do not wish to imply that Madame is suspected by me of any wish to do anything unfair; and that I do not wish to obstruct her interests in any way, or think the two matters need clash; but only to avert the possibility of such clashing.

Yours truly,

G. W. Cable⁹⁴

Her hopes were dimmed by another message from the publishing firm. "Claire" was rejected, the infidelity theme being found unsuitable. The rejection was not total; Scribner was still interested in other Louisiana material. She did not know that it was but a question of time before "Octavie" would be rejected. In a November, 1885 letter, Cable gave the coup de grâce to her hopes with Scribner:

Northam ^N, Mass. Nov 16/85

Dear Mr. Scribner:

I have yours of 14th since mailing mine of this A.M. I have read Mad. Dela H.'s two MSS. [Claire and Octavie] they are shocking. They have no literary value, I think, but are valuable to the historical student; yet not for what they say, but for what they imply.

⁹⁴Letter from G. W. Cable to Charles Scribner, August 27, 1885. In Scribner Archives.

If they were offered to me, I should offer a trifle--say \$10--for them stating my intention not to print them but only to use them as historical data. I shall tell Madame so when I see her.

Yours truly,

G. W. Cable⁹⁵

She had some consolation in seeing three songs she had collected in July, 1884, appear in the Century Magazine. One song appeared in the February, 1886 issue; and her name was listed among contributors, including Lafcadio Hearn and the distinguished music critic Henry E. Krehbiel.⁹⁶ This song was entitled "Caroline et Célestin" and was in standard French. The manuscript was obviously done with Cable in mind, for it is in excellent condition. Cable omitted the title, translated it into faulty Negro patois, and gave it as an example of the lyrics that accompany the almost interminable Counjaille dance: "I could give four verses, but let one suffice; it is from a manuscript copy of the words, probably a hundred years old, that fell into my hands through the courtesy of a Creole lady [our author] some two years ago."⁹⁷ The

⁹⁵Ibid., November 16, 1885.

⁹⁶George W. Cable, "The Dance in Place Congo," Century Magazine, XXXI (February, 1886), 532.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 526.

remark about the age of the manuscript is demonstrably false.⁹⁸

A verse of this rather uninteresting song follows in standard French as our author submitted it:

"Caroline et Célestin"
 Un, deux, trois!
 Caroline, qu'y a-t-il donc ma chère?
 Un, deux, trois!
 Caroline, pourquoi pleures-tu ma chère?
 Je t'aime, tu sais cela,
 Essuie tes yeux, et viens m'embrasser.⁹⁹

Cable gave this version of it:

Inne, dé, trois, Caroline,
 Qui ci ça yé comme ça ma chère?
 Inne, dé, trois, Caroline,
 Quo fère tapé crié ma chère?
 Mo l'aimé toé, to conné ça,
 Siyé to zié et vien bo moin;
 Mo l'aimé toé, to conné ça,
 Siyé to zié et vien bo moin.

Two other songs submitted in standard French were used in the April issue of the Century Magazine.¹⁰⁰ One was translated into English. Perhaps Cable did not care to try his luck again in the Negro patois. The other song was summarized; the collector's name is not mentioned, but allusions to her

⁹⁸The manuscript in Mme de la Houssaye's handwriting is in the William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, XXI (April, 1886), 807-28.

collection make identification easy. In a recent (1959) Cable anthology, Professor Turner has some introductory remarks pertaining to this April, 1886 article.¹⁰¹ The passage that interests us deals with the sources for these songs, as Cable did not list the contributors as he had done in the earlier article: "The trunk which yielded the manuscripts of songs written down many years earlier belonged to Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye, whose large family Cable visited when he went to the Acadian parishes and who was his garrulous tutor in the history and lore of French Louisiana."¹⁰² The trunk is correctly identified, but almost everything else is inaccurate. The songs were not written down many years earlier. Cable had not visited Madame de la Houssaye in Franklin when these songs were published. His only trip to her home in Franklin was in June, 1887. The only other face to face meeting occurred in New Orleans in December 1883-January 1884. She was indeed garrulous, but she was not Cable's tutor. She had nothing to do with any of his works except these three songs and three stories in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

¹⁰¹George W. Cable, Creoles and Cajuns: Stories of Old Louisiana, ed. Arlin Turner (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959).

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 394.

Had she been his tutor, the mistakes in language would not be so obvious in his Louisiana works. More evidence to support this will be introduced after the Century Magazine article is discussed.

Under a heading "Songs of Woods and Waters," Cable gave the source of one of these songs: "From the treasures of the old chest already mentioned comes to my hand, from the last century most likely, on a ragged yellow sheet of paper, written with a green ink, one of these old songs. It would take up much room: I have made a close translation of its stanzas."¹⁰³ The manuscript is not a "ragged yellow sheet of paper written with green ink." It is fresh and clear and had been recently collected. The excuse that it takes up much room is specious. Cable translated the entire song, and his English version runs longer than the French. His use of translation would lead his readers to conclude that he was sparing them some impossible patois. The original text, of which the first stanza is given below, is in standard French:

"Les Bateliers"
 Chantez garçons! maître le dit
 Criez bien fort pour notre maître.
 Avec la rame, frappez l'eau.

¹⁰³George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, p. 821.

Chantez garçons et dépêchez-vous!¹⁰⁴

Reproducing this in the original would hardly have served his purposes as a collector of "Creole" songs. Immediately following the English version of this song comes an introduction to a hunting song. Cable deliberately falsifies the evidence to create an etymological problem--and some interest:

From this same treasury comes a hunting song. Each stanza begins and ends with the loud refrain "Bom-boula! bomboula!" Some one who has studied African tongues may be able to say whether this word is one with Bamboula, the name of the dance and of the drum that dominated it.¹⁰⁵

There is no question of the word in Madame de la Houssaye's copy of the song; it is clearly "bamboula."¹⁰⁶ Cable summarized the song and concluded: "the lines have a fine African ring in them, but--one mustn't print everything."¹⁰⁷ He, for one person, was certainly never guilty of printing everything. The first stanza of this song follows in the standard French

¹⁰⁴Original in William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University.

¹⁰⁵George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, p. 822.

¹⁰⁶Original in William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University.

¹⁰⁷George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, p. 823.

of the manuscript:

"Chanson de chasse"
 Bamboula! bamboula!
 Levez-vous garçons! Prenez vos fusils!
 Allons chercher du gibier pour maître!
 Chevreuils, écureuils, lapins, chats sauvages,
 Petits oiseaux ... maître les aime.
 Bamboula! bamboula!¹⁰⁸

The "fine African ring" Cable mentioned would escape most readers.

In June, 1886 Madame de la Houssaye heard that Cable's latest work was "Grande Pointe": "On parle beaucoup de votre dernier ouvrage "La Grande Pointe" et je suis bien anxieuse de la lire.--Si vous avez besoin d'un traducteur, je serai heureuse d'être choisie par vous et m'acquitterai de cette tâche avec conscience et plaisir."¹⁰⁹ Cable's pre-publication readings from "Grande Pointe" were the high point of his lectures on tour. "Mr. Canonge¹¹⁰ m'écrit bien qu'il a assisté (dans une ville du Nord) à quelques-unes de vos lectures de

¹⁰⁸Original in William Beer Cable Collection at Tulane University.

¹⁰⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, June 1, 1886.

¹¹⁰L. Placide Canonge, editor of L'Abeille, was a living refutation of the charge that Creoles were not familiar with Cable's work. Canonge had heard Cable lecture and he had copies of Old Creole Days, the Grandissimes, and Madame Delphine in his own library, the catalog of which is in the Rare Books Room at Tulane University.

la Grand Pointe; il me les a racontées--je vous félicite de votre succès."¹¹¹

It is the story of an Acadian who brings civilization in the form of the English language to a backward, rural community, Grande Pointe, about fifty-five miles above New Orleans on the Mississippi River. "Grand Pointe" is the story named by those who accuse Cable of stealing our author's stories. Miss Savoie, in her thesis, noted the old charges, but gave no credence to them. She thought it likely that Cable first learned of this area from Madame de la Houssaye,¹¹² but she noted that the unsympathetic portrait of the priest was not compatible with our author's views.¹¹³ She might have added that the author's championing of English at the expense of French would have found little favor with Mme de la Houssaye. The mistakes in French would also preclude her hand in the story. A typical and inexcusable mistake is his spelling of cuite,¹¹⁴ which he

¹¹¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 20, 1886.

¹¹²Savoie, op. cit., p. 61.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Cuite is the last syrup type product that is extracted in the manufacture of sugar before actual crystallization takes place. It is light yellow in appearance and viscous almost to the point of resembling taffy.

rendered as quitte.¹¹⁵ Other mistakes of this type betray his lack of familiarity with the area and its customs.

Most of the charges against Cable grew out of his desire to please Mme de la Houssaye. He named the heroine of "Grande P_ointe" Sidonie. Uninformed people immediately cited this as evidence of theft--a charge that would have embarrassed Madame de la Houssaye no end: "Mille fois merci d'avoir donné mon nom à votre héroïne--je me considère la marraine de "La Grande Pointe." J'ai écrit à New York pour l'avoir. On me répond qu'il n'a pas encore paru."¹¹⁶

A postscript to this letter contains information on a word of Negro patois. It is the second and last time that she was "Cable's tutor:" "Le mot toquaille se dit de toutes personnes qui portent le même nom--c'est un not nègre--ainsi George Washington est votre toquaille et la Sidonie de la Grande Pointe est ma toquaille. ... Je brûle de faire la connaissance de ma toquaille."¹¹⁷

This last sentence indicates that she had no knowledge of "Grande Pointe." In this particular case, Cable was not

¹¹⁵George W. Cable, Bonaventure (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), p. 104.

¹¹⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1886.

guilty.

His duplicity in the fall of 1885 when he prejudiced Mr. Scribner against her had not been detected, however, but in March, 1887, he was caught in a most embarrassing position. He disparaged her works in a letter to the editor of the Century Magazine, and the editor quoted him in his rejection of her "Chattanooga" manuscript. At the same time she was in possession of a letter from Cable praising the "Chattanooga" story. The two were hard to reconcile:

Monsieur, excusez-moi de venir, une fois encore prendre quelques instants de votre temps, mais il est si cruel de voir la manière dont on est traité quelquefois par ceux que nous avons cru nos amis. Avec l'espoir de disposer du second voyage de ma grand'mère ["Chattanooga"], après la publication du premier, je l'ai proposé au Century: je vous envoie sa réponse qui, vrai! m'a fait beaucoup de peine. Ainsi lorsqu'il était en votre pouvoir de m'aider sans qu'il vous en coûtât rien, vous abaissez un ouvrage que vous-même avez déclaré excellent. J'ai regret de n'avoir point envoyé votre lettre au Century; mais je ne me croyais point autorisée à me servir de votre nom.¹¹⁸

She commented on his latest publication "Carancro."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 15, 1887.

¹¹⁹Why Cable spelled Carancro as he did is a mystery. The village is called Carencro. Madame de la Houssaye always referred to it as Carencro.

It had appeared in the January and February issues of Century Magazine:

Je lis en ce moment Carencro [sic]. Si vous avez foi en moi, lorsque vous écrivez encore quelque chose comme cela, laissez-moi corriger le cadien. Vous n'avez pas vécu parmi ces gens-là et ne connaissez leur langue qu'imparfaitement.¹²⁰

Cable answered her letter with an offer to help her publish "Chattanooga," if she could produce something approximating an original manuscript as she had done for the "Voyage de ma grand'mère." She offered all sorts of reasons why she could not comply. For one thing, she had taken the story from scattered notes. Papers would have to be removed surreptitiously from her eighty-six year old mother's collection. This she would not do. She had a proposal of her own. " ... si vous vendez Chattanooga, tel qu'il est, je vous paierai une Commission [underlined twice in pencil]; je l'ai fait traduire par un bon traducteur."¹²¹

She had received some pointed questions from Cable on the historicity of certain characters in "Alix de Morainville." Her handling of the situation was a classic example of her evasive technique. She offered some information (inaccurate),

¹²⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 15, 1887.

¹²¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1887.

gave irrelevant information, and finally regretted a fire that caused the loss of documentary proof:

Maintenant pour dernier argument, parlons d'Alix. Comment avez-vous pu m'accuser de vous avoir vendu un ouvrage dont les personnages historiques étaient faux. J'espérais que vous aviez meilleure opinion de moi. Indiquez-moi ceux dont votre ami n'a pas trouvé les noms sur les records français et je m'empresserai de vous donner leur biographie. Parlons d'abord du Comte Philippe de Ségur né en 1753 et mort en 1833--fut ambassadeur près de Catherine II de Russie.--C'était le propre frère de Mme de Livillier--mère de Madeleine. Ensuite le comte de Maurepas, ministre de Louis XV, fut exilé en 1799--fut rappelé en France par le roi Louis XVI--Son fils depuis duc de Maurepas lui succéda.¹²²

It would have been hard to inject more errors into this passage. The reference to Louis XVI after a 1799 exile was probably a simple slip of the pen. The exile dated from 1749. Let us examine some of the other "facts." The dates on Ségur were 1753-1830, and not 1753-1833. Maurepas was exiled in 1749, but from Paris only. He was not succeeded by his son; he had succeeded his father. On another occasion she had Maurepas (1701-1781) active in the French Revolution. Ironically, she boasted of her grasp of French history in this very letter: "Elle [l'histoire de France] m'est plus familière que celle des E.U."¹²³

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

She offered a completely irrelevant family will dated 1796 to support her position. She obviously thought that one valid document would vouch for all. She ended her letter with an offer to answer any question.¹²⁴

Mirabile dictu, a fire broke out two houses away. She rushed to her old trunk and threw an armful of papers into a tablecloth to remove them from her own home which was threatened. After the fire, the tablecloth and documents were not to be found.¹²⁵ She did not mention which ones were lost.

She asked for specific questions and volunteered the following information:

Vrai, votre soupçon m'a fait de la peine! Je connais qu'il est aussi question de la prise de la Bastille où le gouverneur Launay fut tué par la multitude¹²⁶--Aussi de la jeune princesse de Lamballe, tuée par cette même populace et dont la tête fut portée sur une pique dans les rues de la ville.¹²⁷ ... Je tiens à vous faire voir que tout est vrai dans Alix et dans ma g.m. [grand'mère].¹²⁸

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1887.

¹²⁶In the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript it took place on July 13, 1789.

¹²⁷The Princesse de Lamballe was killed in the September, 1792 massacre. She was forty-three years old at the time of her death--hardly young for that period.

¹²⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1887.

Her next letter indicated that she had consulted various people in New Orleans, including the historian Charles Gayarré, about records of victims of the guillotine during the revolutionary years. Gayarré doubted the existence of lists or rolls of the executed.¹²⁹ She then suggested that Alix de Morainville was a pseudonym she had adopted through shame of marrying beneath her station.¹³⁰ For the first time our author assumes a more defensive and almost belligerent posture. Her arguments will now tend to be in the form of disclaiming responsibility for the errors of another person. Later she will chide Cable for not detecting the errors himself:

Pour moi: voilà tout ce que je puis vous dire: je vous ai livré l'histoire d'Alix de Morainville telle que je l'ai trouvée, et ne me considère point responsable des erreurs de dates et de noms qui peuvent s'y être glissées.¹³¹

Cable was apparently not satisfied and he let it be known. She tried again--this time in English:

Now, dear sir, let me tell you that, when a thing is on my mind, I can not keep it from my friends, and I will have to touch a subject very

¹²⁹She always spelled his name Gayaré. This might indicate that she did not know him.

¹³⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 22, 1887.

¹³¹Ibid.

painful to me. . . . it is hard for me to comprehend, how after four years, suspicions about Alix will come to you. I am sorry and I regret much, that at the time, you did not accept my invitation to come, not only to Franklin, but to my house; it would have been, then, such a pleasure to me to help you in your inquiries and investigations; but now?¹³²

Four weeks later she repeated her stand on "Alix de Morainville." "Je vous ai vendu Alix, comme je l'ai reçu, et il me serait difficile d'attester ce qui s'est passé il y a près de cent ans."¹³³

Cable unexpectedly visited her in Franklin in the early days of June, 1887. This short trip has already been described. Turner quotes Cable as saying he "had the benefits of her few & wise criticisms upon local matters, manners & customs & speech."¹³⁴ Given the almost public nature of their meeting, it is indeed doubtful that they did any constructive work. One wonders, too, if the "few & wise criticisms" were on the order of " ... laissez-moi corriger le cadien. Vous ... ne connaissez pas leur langue qu'imparfaitement." In view of the infinitesimal amount of information pertinent to the Acadians that Cable asked for and

¹³²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 26, 1887.

¹³³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, May 24, 1887.

¹³⁴Turner, George W. Cable, p. 250.

received, another exception must be made to Professor Turner's statement that while working on "Au Large," "he visited the southwestern parishes again and at Franklin went over the manuscripts with Mme de la Houssaye, who had long been his friend and his authority on the Acadians past and present."¹³⁵ There was only one visit of "a few hours." It is inconceivable that they went over several manuscripts in that time, surrounded as they were by members of the family. Our author never mentioned "Au Large," and garrulous as Professor Turner says she was, she would certainly have done so. By her own admission she had nothing to do with "Grande Pointe" or "Carancro." Cable was more interested in the pretense of their cooperation than in actual information about Acadians.

The esteem in which she ostensibly held the Acadians may have been tempered by the air of superiority that Cable attributed to the Creoles, for she once stated: "Je suis allée voir une famille acadienne qui demeure chez mon petit fils. ... ces gens la me font penser aux Chinois; ils vivent au milieu de la civilisation et ne veulent pas être civilisés."¹³⁶ The statement about the Chinese is indicative of the lacunae in

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

¹³⁶ Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, June 26, 1887.

our author's background. On the other hand, she was not the only Creole to attack this weakness of the Acadians. Alcée Fortier noted, "The greatest defect of the Acadians is the little interest they take in education."¹³⁷

Cable constantly reminded our author that he was a busy man, but he maintained his correspondence with her for six years: " ... dans toutes vos lettres vous me rappelez que vous avez bien peu de temps à donner à notre correspondance."¹³⁸

She often renewed her offer of materials to be used at his discretion. "Si nous consentons tous les deux, vous à acheter, moi à vendre, qui cela, regarde-t-il? et où est le mal. A mon âge la reputation d'auteur distingué m'est indifférente."¹³⁹

This was a prelude to an offer:

Je viens donc vous offrir mes Acadiens [Pouponne et Balthazar]. Avec votre talent, vous pourrez j'en suis certaine en faire une oeuvre splendide et votre nom y ajoutera un brillant vernis. Qu'en dites-vous? Personne au monde pas même mes enfants n'y ont jeté un coup d'oeil. Je l'ai écrite en français.¹⁴⁰

This slight interest in French attributed to her grandchildren

¹³⁷Alcée Fortier, Louisiana Studies: Literature, Customs and Dialects, History and Education (New Orleans: F. F. Hansell & Bro., 1894), p. 175.

¹³⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 30, 1887.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

was one of the reasons that led to the ultimate rejection of her granddaughter as a prize-winning writer in the Athénée Louisianais contest.

Madame de la Houssaye sent Cable only one original manuscript in her own English. She mentioned that she was sending an English account of a humorous scene that she had witnessed.¹⁴¹ It was later identified as the translation of "Souvenir de l'Exposition,"¹⁴² the account of the bewilderment and gaucherie of an Acadian family at the 1885 Exposition in New Orleans. Unfortunately the English version is not extant.

In the course of his very brief visit in June, 1887, Cable suggested that our author do an Acadian novel. She vigorously pursued this suggestion only to find that her effort was met with frank indifference:

I must say that I was surprised more than I can express when I read your last letter. You seem having [sic] forgotten that . . . you advised me, during the few hours you passed in Franklin, to write an Acadien [sic] novel and promised me to do all in your power to sell it for me (if it was good enough, well understood). You went as far as to tell me the number of words required; you advised me to send it in french [sic] as translation was very cheap in New York, or in my own english [sic]. Full of confidence in your promise, I put aside a novel I was writing

¹⁴¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 2, 1887.

¹⁴²L.S.U. Library, de la Houssaye MSS, Vol. 7.

for a gentleman in Paris, and as I was determined to send you a m a s t e r p i e c e, I spared neither expenses and trouble, and I have succeeded!¹⁴³

She gave more assurances of the authenticity of the moeurs in her Acadian novel and ended on a dejected note:

But now you do not seem to care about the manuscript, you say: Send it, if you choose. oh! how sad those 5 words made me! Mr. Cable, I know very well that I have no hold upon you, and I do not insist upon sending you the man. if you rather me to keep it.¹⁴⁴

Her correspondent must have been in a quandary when he read apropos of the authenticity of Pouponne et Balthazar that, "Pierre Bossier [the author's grandfather] était de la Flandre française."¹⁴⁵ He had been previously identified as an Alsatian in "The Young Aunt with the White Hair"¹⁴⁶ and as a Prussian in the "Voyage de ma grand'mère."¹⁴⁷

She had not given up hope of translating for Cable. To bring this to his attention she employed a rather transparent ruse. At the beginning of the letter she feigned

¹⁴³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 17, 1887.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1887.

¹⁴⁶Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 26.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 110.

amazement that she had written her last letter in English.

This, she thought, would convey the naturalness and ease with which she employed that idiom: "Est il possible que je vous aie écrit an anglais? Vrai! je ne m'en souviens pas."¹⁴⁸

Toward the end of the letter she referred to the English manuscript she had sent: "Comment avez-vous trouvé l'anglais?"¹⁴⁹

She thought the question would be innocent and natural in context. Unfortunately her rather affected opening remarks put the reader on his guard.

Pouponne et Balthazar had been sent to Cable in August.

When no definite word was forthcoming, she suggested that he read from this novel on his lecture tours. She felt sure that he could equal his success with "Grande Pointe," and she even quoted an unnamed friend who was of the same opinion:

Il y a dans cette nouvelle une source de fortune pour Cable. Il lit admirablement, il parle le français avec l'accent le plus pur. Qu'il s'en aille à New York et que là, il donne plusieurs conférences et lise Pouponne et Balthazar en français. Le premier soir la salle sera pleine, le second, elle sera comble et le 3^{eme} il n'y aura certainement pas assez de place.

Pensez à cela, mon ami, je partage l'opinion de notre ami; je sais que vous prononcez parfaitement

¹⁴⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1887.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

le français. Et je sais encore d'après le Courier des Etats-Unis que les Acadiens sont à la mode à New York.¹⁵⁰

If Cable would push the publication of this work, she would undertake another Acadian story on the life of Louis Como, one of the early Acadian leaders.

Her guarded reference to Cable's French which mentioned only his pronunciation is faint praise, indeed, if considered in the light of the postscript of this letter: "Souvenez-vous que le sort et la vie d'une pauvre mère sont entre vos mains. Je sais votre recommandation puissante."¹⁵¹

An unorthodox proposal was made to Cable in March 1888. She offered to buy back the French manuscripts she had sold him. Her plan was to incorporate them into a larger work called "Les Souvenirs de ma grand'mère." Cable had already made his translation so the original manuscripts were no longer needed, she reasoned. The fact that publication by Cable in English was assured may have influenced her interest in them.¹⁵² She had seen a pre-publication version of the stories and was displeased with what she saw. Cable intended to reproduce

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 5, 1887.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The first story would appear in the November Century Magazine.

some of the semi-literate French of our author's great-aunt. She asked that he omit it for the sake of her aged mother. He would not honor this request.¹⁵³

A copy of Bonaventure, the stories of "Carancro," "Grande Pointe," and "Au Large" in one volume, was sent to Mme de la Houssaye. It came at a propitious moment. "Faut-il vous avouer la vérité et vous dire que j'étais terriblement fâchée contre vous? je m'étais promis de ne jamais plus vous écrire."¹⁵⁴ She reminded him of their agreement on the stories as they would appear in the Century Magazine:

J'espère aussi que vous vous souviendrez de ce dont nous sommes convenus au sujet du voyage et d'Alix. Vous m'avez demandé si je désirais que mon véritable nom parut comme auteur--bien certainement! vous ai-je répondu. Oui, je désire que mon nom, madame S. de la Houssaye, paraisse comme nom d'auteur, tandis que le vôtre comme traducteur en aura surement la plus belle part. Certes, vous avez le droit de raconter que ces souvenirs ont été trouvés parmi les papiers de madame Daniel Pain, ma grand'mère; mais vous savez, comme moi, qu'il m'a fallu déchiffrer les hiéroglyphes écrits par cette chère mère et refaire pour ainsi dire sa narration. Le fond de l'histoire est bien d'elle, mais tout a été revu et corrigé par moi. Ensuite j'ai l'espérance qu'en associant mon nom au vôtre, je collecterai probablement une petite part de votre gloire qui me donnera peut-être plus tard une moisson argentée.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1888.

¹⁵⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 9, 1888.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

The last line quoted is as concise a statement of the motivation in her friendship as one could hope to find.

The November, 1888 Century Magazine published Cable's "How I Got Them," an article containing the genesis of the "true" stories--including the questions and doubts in Cable's mind. The manner in which the article appeared in print shocked Mme de la Houssaye: " ... j'étais loin de croire que vous parleriez de ces preuves comme vous l'avez fait. C'est un os de plus que vous avez jeté à mes ennemis et Dieu sait où s'arrêteront leurs accusations."¹⁵⁶ There were apparently well grounded fears that people in Franklin would write him for information that could be used against her. She added almost parenthetically that she thought she had found the grandson of Alix de Morainville.¹⁵⁷

About two weeks later she asked him not to publish her last letter and added, without too much conviction, that she knew he would not do it.¹⁵⁸

Olive branch in hand, she apologized for the request four months later. Ill health and persecution had prompted

¹⁵⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 13, 1888.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 26, 1888.

her sharp remarks, she said:

Mais je reconnais mes torts et viens à vous, la branche d'olivier à la main, vous priant d'oublier ce que j'ai pu écrire de désagréable. ... Un ami est une chose très précieuse et je ne puis perdre le mien sans essayer de le conserver. Ne pensez-vous pas comme moi?¹⁵⁹

She claimed to have detected an error in the "Voyage de ma grand'mère." She would be glad to point it out to him on his next trip to Louisiana. He would be able to meet Alix's grandson, too, if he came.¹⁶⁰ He showed no inclination to accept her offer.

As though she were afraid that Cable might respond to her invitation, she wrote on the very next day to say that Alix's grandson had lost his papers when the family home burned. Apropos of the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript she added almost belligerently:

Il me semble que depuis six ou sept années que je vous ai vendu ce manuscrit vous avez eu le temps de l'examiner et d'en découvrir les erreurs. Je vous l'ai vendu de bonne foi. Si je l'avais examiné avec attention, j'aurais probablement découvert les erreurs.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 30, 1889.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹She was quite familiar with the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript and probably had another copy of it. She reproduced sections of it verbatim in her unpublished "Redoutables."

Vous avez traduit le manuscrit et n'avez rien vu, comment aurais-je pu, moi, les découvrir en si peu de temps.¹⁶²

Changing to a more conciliatory tone, she had another suggestion: "Comme vous le savez bien, tout s'est passé de bonne foi entre nous, et je ne vois qu'un moyen de remédier à tout cela, le silence."¹⁶³ In a postscript she urged him to ignore a memorandum that an unnamed person had sent him. It is curious in that it is the only example of her changing languages in the same letter: "Does not that memorandum come from Franklin? You do not know what cruel enemies [sic] I have here."¹⁶⁴

Cable must have agreed with her, for she greeted him ecstatically a week later.

Avant d'ajouter un mot à cette lettre, permettez moi, m o n a m i! de vous tendre la main et de vous remercier, avec tout l'élan de mon coeur de la noble confiance que vous m'avez témoignée. J'en suis fière et souvenez-vous bien que l'amitié de C a b l e 's f r i e n d ne vous fera jamais défaut; tout autre, en lisant le s t a t e m e n t qui vous a été envoyé, m'aurait soupçonnée, mais vous, votre âme est trop noble, trop grande pour y donner accès au soupçon.¹⁶⁵

To show her gratitude she produced a copy of an 1841

¹⁶²A lie.

¹⁶³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 31, 1889.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 7, 1889.

journal entry that satisfactorily solved Cable's problem. This entry recorded the visit of Mr. Gerbeau and his remarks to the effect that he had kept the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript two years before forwarding it to our author's grandmother. A copy of this entry was made in the presence of a stranger of "high standing"--her granddaughter's husband. A remark she made about Mr. Gerbeau, however, indirectly undermined the credibility of her witness: "C'était le meilleur homme du monde, mais très menteur, comme le sont du reste tous les grands causeurs."¹⁶⁶

She recalled meeting a lady in Franklin who told a story similar to "Alix de Morainville." This lady could not document her story; her papers had been lost in a fire.¹⁶⁷ The prevalence of such stories, especially in St. Martinville, had made Cable suspicious several years earlier. Tinker noted that our author's grandchildren had an 1884 letter from Cable containing an offer of \$5.00 for a one thousand word, documented article on the early history of St. Martinville. References to specific official documents had to accompany the text.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 11, 1889.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Tinker, Les Ecrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIX^e siècle, p. 110.

The letter can be interpreted as indicative of Cable's parsimony. It was that, indeed, but more importantly it was a polite way of questioning the legends that enveloped the area's history. Needless to say, she never produced a documentary history of the early days of St. Martinville.

Another April, 1889 letter was used by Turner in a manner that can only be described as misleading. Professor Turner implied that Mme de la Houssaye had passed on to Cable, "an immeasurable store of knowledge," adding that in gratitude the latter interceded for her with Mr. Scribner and other publishers. (Cable's actual recommendations have been noted.) Her offers to submit material to him à la Dumas were also cited by Turner, who ends his statement with a quote suggesting that Cable had conducted himself on a high ethical level and in a gentlemanly manner throughout their correspondence:

In one of her last letters, April 22, 1889, she was as voluble as ever, though nearing seventy: 'Soyez convaincu que votre noble conduite à mon égard n'est pas adressée à une ingrate et que vous aurez toujours des amis dévotés [siz] dans mes enfants et dans moi.'¹⁶⁹

In context this quotation is as much a threat as an expression of friendship. Harassed by detractors and tormented by ill health, she wanted to avoid adverse publicity at any

¹⁶⁹Turner, George W. Cable, pp. 238-39.

cost. She did not consider flattering the "How I Got Them" article in the November, 1888 Century Magazine and clearly hoped that there would be no repetitions of such articles.

Professor Turner's above citation follows in context:

Ma santé ne s'améliore pas et l'inquiétude augmente mon mal. Mon cher Mr. Cable, si vraiment vous êtes mon ami, et je le crois, soyez bien prudent en parlant de moi, je vous en supplie. Si les journaux de la La. s'en mêlent, si mes ennemis de Franklin déchirent mon nom et mon coeur, mon fils le capitaine répondra à son tour,¹⁷⁰ hélas! hélas! mes amis d'un côté, les vôtres de l'autre! et ce sera une véritable guerre dont je serai la 1ere victime; car je vous l'ai dit, la publicité m'épouvante et je suis prête à tout pour y échapper--Soyez convaincu que votre noble conduite à mon égard ne s'est pas adressée à une ingrate et que vous aurez toujours des amis dévoués dans mes enfants et dans moi.¹⁷¹

The statement is not so flattering as Professor Turner would have us believe. Toward the close of this same letter she counseled silence as the best solution to their problems:

Le mieux, il me semble, serait le silence, moi, j'échapperai aux tortures que m'inspire un public méchant, et vous, mon ami, au ridicule toujours terrible pour l'écrivain¹⁷²--et de plus, vous vous

¹⁷⁰It is conceivable that her son Louis would have sought satisfaction from Cable, puny as the latter was. A lady who knew Mme de la Houssaye recalled that Louis slapped the face of the parish priest for making disparaging remarks about his mother.

¹⁷¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 22, 1889.

¹⁷²Later Cable did find himself in the awkward position of correcting "facts" in his carefully researched (by his own admission) "true" stories.

acquerez des amis dévoués--mais je suppose qu'en ce moment tout est prêt pour le prochain Century. Fasse le Ciel que je n'aie trop à souffrir.¹⁷³

A later issue of that magazine was to prove that her fears were not groundless.

In the summer months of 1889, there were several letters relevant to a portrait that Cable wanted copied for the frontispiece of the bound edition of Strange True Stories of Louisiana. The business was entirely routine.

The appearance of Cable's letter in the "Open Letters" of the September, 1889 Century Magazine was probably one of the proximate causes of the final break in her precarious ties to Cable.¹⁷⁴ The letter, which the editor entitled "Strange True Stories of Louisiana," was necessitated by public criticism of two anachronisms in "Alix de Morainville." In the summary the anachronisms were omitted in order not to confuse the reader, but they must be mentioned at this point if we are to understand why the Century readers criticized Cable.

In the first case we find a de la Houssaye in the midst of the San Domingan insurrection before the French Revolution. Such an error was inexcusable after Cable's

¹⁷³ Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 22, 1889.

¹⁷⁴ George W. Cable, a letter in "Open Letters," Century Magazine, XXXVIII (September, 1889), 798-99.

pretentious "How I Got Them" preface. We know, too, that he had almost six years in which to verify this story before publication.

The second error would have escaped all but students of French history. The Count de Maurepas (1701-1781) was described as a participant in the events of the French Revolution.

Cable tried to minimize his mistakes by involving others in his own oversight: "For all this time two huge, glaring anachronisms were staring me, and half a dozen other persons, squarely in the face, and actually escaping our notice by their serene audacity."¹⁷⁵

Who wrote this manuscript that Mme de la Houssaye found among her mother's papers? Stylistically it was incompatible with her grandmother's and great-aunt's work. Her mother showed no interest in the literary aspects of the manuscript. Cable concluded that the person called Alix could not have written such historical blunders in 1795: "The misstatements are of later date, and from some one to whom the events were historical."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 798.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 799.

Cable, who was unduly fond of dramatic presentations, almost immediately rejected his own conclusion. He claimed to have noticed glosses in the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" manuscript. The very ending of the story was in fact a gloss. Mme de la Houssaye admitted that she had invented the presentation of the manuscript by Alix in lieu of a detailed explanation of its origin. She also admitted that the M. Gerbeau in the story had kept the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript two years before sending a copy to her grandmother and great-aunt.¹⁷⁷ Cable accepted this as proof that Alix had indeed written the story. The errors would have to be attributed to the copyist. He left no doubt as to whom he considered to be the copyist:

Whoever made this copy it remains still so simple and compact that he or she cannot be charged with many embellishments. And yet it is easy to believe that some one with that looseness of family tradition and largeness of ancestral pride so common among the Creoles, in half-knowledge and half-ignorance should have ventured aside for an instant to attribute in pure parenthesis to an ancestral de la Houssaye the premature honor of a San Domingan war . . .¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Mme de la Houssaye almost too conveniently produced an 1841 diary entry alluding to M. Gerbeau's visit in the course of which he mentioned keeping the "Alix de Morainville" manuscript two years before sending a copy to her grandmother and great-aunt. It should be noted that this is the only mention she ever made of a diary. It is not convincing.

¹⁷⁸ Cable, "Open Letter," loc. cit., p. 799.

The concluding paragraph is consistent with the superficial and, at times, incoherent defense of his position:

To reject the whole matter as a forgery flies into the face of more incontestable facts than the anachronisms do. We know, without this manuscript [only from the owner of the manuscript], that there was an Alix Carpentier, daughter of a count, widow of a viscount, an émigré of the Revolution, married to a Norman peasant, known to M. Gerbeau, beloved of Suzanne and Francoise, with whom they journeyed to Attakapas, and who wrote for them the history of her strange life. I hold a manuscript carefully kept by at least two generations of Francoise's descendants among their valuable papers. It professes to be that history--a short, modest, undorned narrative, apparently a copy of a paper of like compass, notwithstanding the evident insertion of two impossible statements whose complete omission does not disturb the narrative. I see no good reason to doubt that it contains the true story of a real and lovely woman.¹⁷⁹

The whole proof depends on Mme de la Houssaye, unsupported statements, and apparently "manufactured" evidence (the diary entry). Cable's performance is not convincing.

The expressions "looseness of family tradition," "largeness of ancestral pride," and "half-knowledge and half-ignorance" as used patronizingly by Cable were insulting to Mme de la Houssaye and her family. Her mother, in particular, resented being introduced to the public under such questionable circumstances. The emotion that it caused in her family prompted our author to use her strongest language:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Je n'avais pas encore reçu le Century lorsque je vous ai écrit vendredi passé. Je dois avouer que c'est avec une surprise bien douloureuse que j'ai lu l'article que vous y avez inséré. Ainsi lorsque j'avais foi dans l'amitié que vous me témoignez dans toutes vos lettres, lorsque vous me demandiez de légers services [the copy of the photograph, etc.] rendus avec tant de plaisir! Vous écriviez contre moi un article destiné à appeler sur ma tête les soupçons du Public! Ah! jamais, je ne vous aurais cru capable d'une pareille action! Vous n'avez tenu votre parole en rien! Vous m'avez promis de ne jamais toucher aux f e e l i n g s de ma mère; une méchante personne [the author's brother-in-law] s'est donné la peine de traduire votre article et de le lui faire lire et les larmes de la pauvre vieille m'ont brisé le coeur. Si vous voulez savoir pourquoi je vous ai vendu les papiers dont vous parlez [the manuscripts of "Voyage de ma grand'mère" and "Alix de Morainville"], c'est que j'ai été forcée par une cruelle nécessité. Je ne possède rien au monde et suis dépendante entièrement des autres. Maintenant répondez-moi franchement; pourquoi cette persécution destinée à me rendre malheureuse? Soyez franc, je vous en prie. Lorsque au bout d'une année, la loi accorde à toute transaction le bénéfice de la prescription, pourquoi vous, après plus de six ans, me persécutez-vous ainsi? Je vous en prie, dites-moi vos raisons et au moins, accordez-moi la chance de me défendre.

Je suis prête à répondre à toutes vos questions. Je vous ai toujours traité en ami, avez vous cessé de l'être? Vous m'avez écrit que vous aviez trouvé une solution au mystère des dates, une solution qui ne devait compromettre personne, et pourtant! Je vous ai écrit que j'avais un grand nombre d'ennemis. Ils sont, je pense, tous à l'oeuvre en ce moment et vous enverront de nouvelles accusations contre moi.¹⁸⁰

The ending of this letter was prophetic: "Devons-nous continuer notre correspondance si agréable pour moi? ou allez-vous bientôt m'appeler à répondre à de nouvelles

¹⁸⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 5, 1889.

accusations? Avertissez-moi."¹⁸¹

The only extant copy of any of Cable's letters to her is his reply to this September 5, 1889 letter. Of all the letters to her, only the one offering \$5.00 for the St. Martinville history was mentioned after her death. She probably destroyed the letters herself to avoid the possibility of their getting into the hands of a hostile public. Cable had the saving instincts of a pack rat, and he kept her letters, even the decidedly unfavorable ones.¹⁸² It is possible that he kept copies of his letters to her, although, at present, only one very poor and partially illegible press copy survives. One can glean a few things from this one letter of September 12, 1889. Cable was apologetic, and said that he did not mean to attack her integrity and candor: "I have taken pains in the letter to make my boast of your friendship . . . and to pay honor to the trust of yourself and your lovely ancestress Françoise . . ."¹⁸³

This apology elicited a fervent merci in a brief reply.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²In one Cable collection alone (Tulane University) there are over 28,000 items.

¹⁸³Letter from George W. Cable, September 12, 1889 William Beer Cable Collection, Tulane University.

¹⁸⁴Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 13, 1889.

She thought she had been forgotten, because no other letter followed his apology.¹⁸⁵ In this, her second-to-last letter, she was still trying to find a publisher for Octavia:

L'horrible drame raconté dans Octavia et vrai dans tous ses détails a excité l'horreur des éditeurs américains qui cependant ne rougissent pas de traduire et de publier les indécences d'Emile Zola . . .¹⁸⁶ Vous devinez maintenant ce que je désire de vous mon ami? quelques bonnes paroles, une recommandation à un éditeur qui ne sera pas si prude que messieurs Laird & Lee.¹⁸⁷

The whole affair was very much reminiscent of the earlier rejection by Scribner.

Her last letter, dated January 21, 1890, came almost six years to the day after her first one. There was no hint that it was to be her last. "Souvenez-vous, mon cher Mr. Cable, qu'il est en votre pouvoir de me faire un bien incalculable. Seulement en me recommandant a un éditeur. Me refuserez-vous?"¹⁸⁸ Henri Arnaud, whose French language thesis we have noted, blamed Madame de la Houssaye and other local writers for allowing themselves to be exploited by Cable:

¹⁸⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

¹⁸⁶This is the only reference made in the correspondence to a post-Romantic writer.

¹⁸⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

¹⁸⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 21, 1890.

... Ces écrivains voulaient tirer parti de leurs écrits dans le délai le plus court possible. Ils demandaient conseil à Cable, et celui-ci les dissuadait de leur entreprise, leur représentant les difficultés d'obtenir un éditeur! Alors que lui les payait argent comptant.¹⁸⁹

This observation showed remarkable perception in view of the fact that M. Arnaud had not seen our author's correspondence. He was basing his conclusions mainly on the case of Mrs. Dora Miller whom Cable had treated shabbily.¹⁹⁰

The last lines Mme de la Houssaye wrote to Cable serve as a fitting close to their correspondence: "Je termine en vous priant de recevoir l'assurance de ma considération bien amicale."¹⁹¹

No specific incident, unless it be the letter in the September, 1889 Century Magazine, can be singled out as the one and definitive cause of the rupture. Both were consciously trying to take advantage of each other. Cable's need for Sidonie de la Houssaye had ceased with the Century letter. She had served her dual role of "dear Creole friend" and scapegoat very well. Cable's best years were behind him

¹⁸⁹Arnaud, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁹⁰Dora Miller was the author of "War Diary of a Union Woman in the South" in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

¹⁹¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 21, 1890.

when he finished Old Creole Days and the Grandissimes. Bona-
venture, published after he left Louisiana was a step downward.
After that he produced nothing to rival his earlier works.
Other interests were attracting his attention, and he was
probably tiring of his importunate Creole correspondent whom
he no longer really needed. He probably said to himself some-
thing comparable to the statement Frederick the Great reputedly
made about Voltaire when he was tiring of the latter: "On
presse l'orange, et on la jette quand on en a avalé le jus."

CHAPTER III

LES QUARTERONNES DE LA NOUVELLE-ORLEANS

The Quadroon in History and Literature

Before discussing the author's works, we must have a knowledge of the historical cadre of the quadroon. A quart-ronne (quadroon) is the issue of a mulatto and a white. Not infrequently, any person of less than pure Negro blood is called a quadroon. This appellation should be rejected.¹

One need not concern himself with all the theoretically possible degrees of racial mixture, although some have calculated them to a point where they become meaningless. One should, however, recognize the few basic types in order to understand the references which will follow. The three most common mixtures were: (1) the mulatto--one white and one Negro parent, (2) the quadroon--one white and one mulatto parent, (3) the octoroon--one white and one quadroon parent. The word griffe indicates the offspring of a Negro and a mulatto. The word

¹The French gens de couleur is, however, sufficiently broad to embrace the many possible admixtures of Negro blood. Pure blooded Negroes were never referred to as gens de couleur.

is infrequently used and, as a result, not generally understood. Lyle Saxon, who passes among the uninitiated as something of an authority, did not know that a griffe was darker than the three better known types. In his highly romantic Fabulous New Orleans, he has a chapter on the quadroon balls. His error came when he attempted to give the gradations in color. "Many gradations of color resulted; mulatto, quadroon, octaroon [sic], griffe--each one a little lighter than the last."²

Saxon's error found its way into Mrs. Annie Lee West Stahl's thesis in 1934.³ Miss Mary Scott Duchein cited Saxon's passage and noted that his terminology was not standard in Southwest Louisiana. "Griffe is not the lightest in complexion. In Southwest Louisiana, griffe is the darkest of mulattoes."⁴ She might have added that griffe is never understood to indicate a lighter shading than mulatto, quadroon or octaroon in any part of Louisiana.

²Lyle Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans (New York: The Century Co., 1928), p. 180.

³Annie Lee West Stahl, "The Free Negro in Ante Bellum Louisiana" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, Louisiana State University, 1934), p. i.

⁴Mary Scott Duchein, Research on Charles Etienne Arthur Gayarré" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Romance Languages, Louisiana State University, 1934), p. 123 N.

Quadroons and their society attracted travelers and superficial observers from the earliest days of the nineteenth century until the Civil War. These people, who in some cases spent as little as one week in New Orleans, gave sensational and usually erroneous accounts of the activities in that city. Unfortunately for the sake of history, their accounts were accepted as trustworthy.

Ethnocentrism is an almost constant factor in their writing particularly in the case of traveling Europeans. One notes caricatures of Americans, Creoles, Irish, and Germans. There is little to be commended in the New World. We can sympathize with the abolitionist sentiment of the travelers (though their knowledge of slavery and its practices was quite inaccurate), but we can not accept their value judgments based on false premises and ignorance. Bad as their reporting was, it set the tone that tradition maintains to this day. George W. Cable read these writers. Madame de la Houssaye apparently read some of them. In the twentieth century, Lyle Saxon and Harnett Kane are clearly influenced by them.

Using these highly romanticized reports as a starting point, we shall begin by giving some of the clichés associated with the quadroons. After giving the legendary aspects of the problem, we shall turn to the few available facts and the more

prosaic truth. Serious historians saw the quadroons in perspective and were inclined either to ignore them or give them minimal attention.

One of the earliest commentators was Paul Alliott, a Frenchman, who wrote in 1803. As late as 1952, he was seriously proposed as a reliable witness.⁵ Alliott's observations were translated by James A. Robertson and included in his work on Louisiana under the rule of three governments.⁶ Alliott, a charlatan, was deported from Louisiana for practicing medicine without a license. He claimed to treat and cure: "cancers or cankers, even after gangrene has set in, venereal diseases, even the most inveterate without mercury, wounds of all kinds, even cut sinews, the Pest, Deafness, Smallpox, etc."⁷ He went to France and wrote his reminiscences which he submitted to President Jefferson.

Two paragraphs from Alliott as translated by Robertson constitute a good introduction to the quadroon legend:

⁵Donald E. Everett, "Free Persons of Color in New Orleans 1803-1865" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Tulane University, 1952), pp. 36 ff.

⁶James A. Robertson, Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911)

⁷Ibid.

All the men of color or free negroes make their sons learn a trade, and give a special education to their daughters whom they rarely marry off. When the girls attain the age of thirteen or fourteen, their mothers usually place them with white men, who have generally much more regard for them in their domestic economy than they do for their legitimate wives. However, the [white] women show the greatest contempt and aversion for that sort of women.

These women inspire such lust through their bearing, their gestures, and their dress, that many quite well-to-do persons are ruined in pleasing them. It is worth noting that when these women perceive that the men with whom they live have nothing more, they desert and abandon them, and take up with another man. Those among them who have children are very careful to rear them in the same sentiments.⁸

It is true that many free men of color excelled as artisans. What else could they do without education? The practice of mothers "placing" their daughters is reported by nearly all of the commentators. Intermarriage was prohibited by law, but the law was apparently lenient as to miscegenated concubinage. Marriage in church was permitted, but it gave no legal sanction or protection under civil law. Moreover, a religious ceremony would have been folly for a young man. It would deprive him of the chance to marry one of his own kind and it would put him under the burden of ostracism. Men have always been careful on certain points of this nature. They will consort with prostitutes and concubines, but they usually

⁸Ibid., pp. 146-47.

have enough common sense not to marry them. It is this perverted sense of values that gave birth to the system of placage in New Orleans. According to the general tradition, a young girl whose virtue had been vigorously protected was "placed" with a man offering sufficient financial guarantees to her and to her family. The placée (as they were called) was then set up in her own house. Her protector supported her and, possibly, a legal (white) family, also.

The Duke of Saxe-Weimar spent nine weeks in New Orleans in the early months of 1826. He was a military man in the employ of the King of the Netherlands. His travels through North America were ostensibly for educational purposes. The recollections of his trip were published in 1828.⁹ Nearly every succeeding writer on early New Orleans read this work. Cable quoted him in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.¹⁰ The myth of the Creole's lack of loyalty to the American government is found in His Highness' work. Cable may have taken some of his views from him. Lyle Saxon, Grace King, Harnett Kane, and many lesser figures are also indebted to him for certain

⁹His Highness Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisennach, Travels Through North America, during the Years 1825 and 1826 (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1828).

¹⁰Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 154.

assumptions.

The Duke of Saxe-Weimar wrote in a colorful style that was marred by contradictions, prejudice and inaccuracies. In addition, he was fascinated by all forms of vice. He seems to have visited almost every gambling den from Pensacola to New Orleans. By his own admission he could not stay away from the quadroom balls.

A series of rather startling geographical observations sets the tone of His Highness' recollections of New Orleans. We learn that the Rigolets and Chef Menteur (the two waterways that connect Lake Pontchartrain to Lake Borgne) are "above a mile broad."¹¹ On the following page he surmises that "the Mississippi River must be above 80 fathoms deep."¹² Elsewhere he refers to former Governor Robertson as Mr. Robinson and to General Villeré, of War of 1812 fame, as General Villaret.¹³

His description of the balls has become standard. For example, the practice of reserving the second row of boxes at the theatre for gens de couleur and occasionally the poulailler [the highest and cheapest seats in the house] for slaves is

¹¹Bernhard, op. cit., p. 53.

¹²Ibid., p. 54.

¹³Ibid., p. 63.

found in his book.¹⁴ He was accurate in this as he was when he classified the balls. There were subscription balls, masquerade balls and quadroon balls--the latter often being masked balls as well.

None but good society were admitted to these subscription balls; the first that we attended was not crowded, however, the generality of the ladies present were pretty, and had a very genteel French air. The dress was extremely elegant, and after the latest Paris fashion. The ladies danced upon the whole, excellently, and did great honour to their French teachers. Dancing, and some instruction in music, is almost the whole education of the female Creoles.

Most of the gentlemen here are far behind the ladies in elegance. They did not remain long at the ball, but hasted away to the quadroon ball so called, where they amused themselves more, and were more at their ease. This was the reason why there were more ladies than gentlemen at the ball and that many were obliged to form "tapestry." ["faire tapisserie" means "to be a wallflower"] When a lady is left sitting it is said to be bredouille.¹⁵

The Duke also attended a masked ball which was typical of the entertainment of those who did not go to the socially acceptable subscription balls. Heavy drinking, gambling, and swordplay were regular features. The following article, entitled "Sunday Night Row," gives us an idea of the activities:

At the lower end of the city, there is a ball-room which has a very appropriate name, for it is called

¹⁴Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 58.

the Union, and is notwithstanding almost weekly the scene of riot and bloodshed. A person who lives in the neighborhood of this room, tells us there was much noise and fighting on Sunday night last in and opposite the above room. He believes that there were as many as fifteen persons fighting in the street at one time; and thinks one or more were dangerously wounded. The vacarm was dreadful; a mixture of cursing by the men, crying by the women, and groans from the wounded. Would it not tend to diminish this evil and add greatly to our quiet, were all balls of a certain description, removed as far as possible to the outskirts of the suburbs?¹⁶

The common practice of excluding colored men from the quadroon balls was reported:

At the quadroon balls, only coloured ladies are admitted, the men of that caste, be it understood, are shut out by the white gentlemen. To take away all semblance of vulgarity, the price of admission is fixed at two dollars, so that only persons of the better class can appear there.¹⁷

If we are to believe His Highness, it was only an heroic sense of duty that compelled him to attend one of the balls:

As a stranger in my situation should see every thing, to acquire a knowledge of the habits, customs, opinions and prejudices of the people he is among, therefore I accepted the offer of some gentlemen who proposed to carry me to this quadroon ball. And I must avow I found it much more decent than the masked ball. The coloured ladies were under the eye of their mothers.¹⁸ They were well and gracefully dressed, and

¹⁶Louisiana Gazette (New Orleans), January 18, 1820.

¹⁷Bernhard, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁸Nearly all commentators after Bernhard will speak of these events as being well chaperoned.

conducted themselves with much propriety and modesty.¹⁹ Cotillions and waltzes were danced, and several of the ladies performed elegantly. I did not remain long there that I might not utterly destroy my standing in New Orleans, but returned to the white ladies where I had been. I could not, however, refrain from making comparisons, which in no wise redounded to the advantage of the white assembly. As soon as I entered I found a state of formality.²⁰

Why a state of formality displeased him is not clear.

An earlier traveler whose observations were not remarkable for their accuracy had called the white balls "fort ennuyeux."²¹ Bernhard's editor explained why he had to return to the less exciting white ball: "If it be known that a stranger, who had pretensions to mix with good society, frequents such balls as these, he may rely upon a cold reception from the white ladies."²²

On another occasion he attended a masquerade at the St. Philippe theatre: "The female company consisted of quadroons, who, however, were masked. Several of them addressed me, and coquetted with me some time, in the most subtle and

¹⁹The stereotyped quadroon was also a model of decorum and propriety before plaçage.

²⁰Bernhard, op. cit., p. 63.

²¹C. C. Robin, Voyages dans l'intérieur de la Louisiane, de la Floride occidentale et dans les îles de la Martinique et de Saint-Domingue pendant les années 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, et 1806. (3 vols.; Paris: F. Buisson, 1807), Vol. II, p. 120.

²²Bernhard, op. cit., p. 63, N.

amusing manner."²³

On Mardi Gras day he made brief appearances at the highly respectable Théâtre d'Orléans and at the Théâtre St. Philippe where a quadroom ball was held:

I could not restrain my curiosity, and visited the quadroom ball in the theatre of St. Philippe. It however was too late when I arrived there, many of the ladies had left the ball, and the gentlemen, a motley society, for the most part drunk.²⁴

He returned to the principal ball and found the men equally drunk and noisy.

This, however, was not his last contact with the quadrooms:

It was pure curiosity that carried me a third time to the masquerade, in St. Philippe's theatre. It was, however, no more agreeable than the one eight days previous. There were but few masks; and among the tobacco-chewing gentry several Spanish visages slipped about, who carried sword-canes, and seemed to have no good design in carrying them. Some of the visitors [sic] were intoxicated, and there appeared a willing disposition for disturbance. The whole aspect was that of a den of ruffians. I did not remain here a half hour, and learned next day that I was judicious in going home early, as later, battles with canes and dirks had taken place. Twenty persons were more or less dangerously wounded!²⁵

The Duke of Saxe-Weimar did not know what a quadroom

²³Ibid., p. 64.

²⁴Ibid., p. 70.

²⁵Ibid., p. 71.

was. His attempt at defining the term shows that he confused quadroons with octoroons. His use of the word mestize (métis) was also an unhappy choice. The term is too generic to have any real value, as it covers any racially mixed blood. As incorrectly used by Saxe-Weimar, however, it would be limited to one mixture--the quadroon: "A quadroon is the child of a mestize mother and a white father, as a mestize is the child of a mulatto mother and a white father."²⁶ The sentence should read: "An octoroon is the child of a quadroon mother and a white father, as a quadroon is the child of a mulatto mother and a white father."

Many other observations by the Duke on quadroons were slavishly copied by his imitators. He spoke of their complexion, their marital arrangements, the restrictions placed on them, the aversion of white ladies, their own contempt for their darker brothers, and their tragic situation:

The quadroons are almost entirely white; from their skin no one would detect their origin; nay many of them have as fair a complexion as many of the haughty Creole females. Such of them as frequent these balls are free. Formerly they were known by their black hair and eyes, but at present there are completely fair quadroon males and females. Still, however, the strongest prejudice reigns against them on account of their black blood, and the white ladies maintain, or affect to maintain,

²⁶Ibid., p. 61.

the most violent aversion towards them. Marriage between the white and coloured population is forbidden by the law of the state. As the quadroons on their part regard the negroes and mulattoes with contempt, and will not mix with them, so nothing remains for them but to be friends, as it is termed, of the white men. The female quadroon looks upon such an engagement as a matrimonial contract, though it goes no farther than a formal contract by which the "friend" engages to pay the father or mother of the quadroon a specified sum. The quadroons both assume the names of the friends, and as I am assured, preserve this engagement with as much fidelity as ladies espoused at the altar. Several of these girls have inherited property from their fathers or friends, and possess handsome fortunes. Notwithstanding this, their situation is always very humiliating. They cannot drive through the streets in a carriage, and their "friends" are forced to bring them in their own conveyances after dark to the ball: they dare not sit in the presence of white ladies, and cannot enter their apartments without especial permission. The whites have the privilege to procure these unfortunate creatures a whipping like that inflicted on slaves, upon an accusation proved by two witnesses. Several of these females have enjoyed the benefits of as careful an education as most of the whites; they conduct themselves ordinarily with more propriety and decorum, and confer more happiness on their "friends," than many of the white ladies do to their married lords. Still, the white ladies constantly speak with the greatest contempt, and even with animosity, of these unhappy and oppressed beings. The strongest language of high nobility in the monarchies of the old world, cannot be more haughty, overwhelming or contemptuous toward their fellow creatures, than the expressions of the Creole females with regard to the quadroons, in one of the much vaunted states of the free Union? In fact, such comparison strikes the mind of a thinking being very singularly! Many wealthy fathers, on account of the existing prejudices send daughters of this description to France, where these girls with a good education and property, find no difficulty in forming a legitimate establishment.²⁷

²⁷Ibid., pp. 61-62.

His Highness interpreted poor attendance at a ball on Washington's birthday as evidence of the Creole's lack of attachment to the United States. The fact that the city was in a period of financial crisis was discounted:

It [the poor attendance] was attempted to be accounted for, by the critical juncture of commercial affairs, in which the city was placed; the true cause, however, might be traced to the incomprehensible want of attachment among the Creoles to the United States. Although the city of New Orleans, and the whole state of Louisiana, has benefited extremely by its union with the United States, and daily increases; yet the creoles appear rather to wish their country should be a French colony, than annexed to the Union.²⁸

The departing Duke of Saxe-Weimar had a Parthian shot that only served to confirm his prejudices:

. . . the people with whom I was least pleased here, were the Americans, who are mostly brought only by the desire of accumulating wealth. The Germans in Louisiana, unhappily rank behind even the Irish. They are mostly a lazy race, not distinguished for their morality, and very different from their countrymen in Pennsylvania, who, on account of their moral and industrious character, are universally respected, and are worthy of high regard.²⁹

He was continuing the tradition of many foreign visitors. One year before his book was published, a writer for Le Courier in New Orleans complained in a manner reminiscent of Montaigne's statement of a similar nature:

²⁸Ibid., p. 72.

²⁹Ibid., p. 84.

J'ay honte de veoir nos hommes enyvrez de cette sottte humeur, de s'effaroucher des formes contraires aux leurs: il leur semble estre hors de leur element, quand ils sont hors de leur village; où qu'ils aillent, ils se tiennent à leurs façons, et abominent les estrangieres.³⁰

The New Orleans editor wrote:

On s'est souvent plaint que les voyageurs étrangers qui ont écrit sur les Etats-Unis, se laissaient entrainer à ce penchant malheureusement trop connu parmi les hommes, de blâmer tout ce qu'ils n'ont pas été habitués à voir chez eux.³¹

The lady travelers did not hesitate to report the hearsay information they had acquired. A Mrs. Trollope stayed in New Orleans from December 25, 1827 to January 1, 1828. By her own admission she did not enter into society. She did hear many stories, however. After her, the epithets "beautiful," "gentle," "graceful," and "amiable" became fixed in quadron lore. Her other remarks were the usual ones on prejudice, education, and marriage:

Our stay in New Orleans was not long enough to permit our entering into society, but I was told that it contained two distinct sets of people, both celebrated in their way, for their social meetings and elegant entertainments. The first of these is composed of Creole families, who are chiefly planters and merchants, with their wives and daughters; these meet together, eat together, and are very grand and aristocratic; each of

³⁰Montaigne, Essais De la vanite, III, ix.

³¹Le Courrier (New Orleans), January 13, 1827.

their balls is a little Almanack's, and every portly dame of the set is as exclusive in her principles as a lady patroness. The other set consists of the excluded, but amiable Quadroons, and such of the gentlemen of the former class as can by any means escape from the high places, where pure Creole blood swells the veins at the bare mention of any being tainted in the remotest degree with the Negro stain.

Of all the prejudices I have ever witnessed, this appears to me the most violent and most inveterate. Quadroon girls, the acknowledged daughters of wealthy American or Creole fathers, educated with all of style and accomplishments which money can procure at New Orleans; exquisitely beautiful, graceful, gentle, and amiable, they are not admitted, nay, are not on any terms admissible into the society of Creole families of Louisiana. They cannot marry; that is to say, no ceremony can render a union with them legal or binding; yet such is the powerful effect of their very peculiar grace, beauty, and sweetness of manner, that unfortunately they perpetually become the objects of choice and affection. If the Creole ladies have privilege to exercise the awful power of repulsion, the gentle Quadroon has the sweet but dangerous vengeance of possessing that of attraction. The unions formed with this unfortunate race are said to be often lasting and happy, as far as any unions can be so to which a certain degree of disgrace is attached.³²

Another British lady, Harriet Martineau, visited the United States and spent all of ten days in New Orleans in 1834. She returned home to air her decidedly anti-American and anti-Creole prejudices in two books. New Orleans and its Creole citizens were especial targets of her vitriol: "I believe that even yet no American expects to get a verdict, on any

³²Frances Milton Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Co., 1832), p. 32.

evidence, from a jury of French Creoles."³³ Apropos of New Orleans she wrote: ". . . it is the last place in which men are gathered together where one who prizes his humanity would wish to live."³⁴

Her observations on the quadroons are found in Society in America which antedated Retrospect of Western Travel.³⁵ Again hearsay is the source of her information. She does add, however, relatively new comments in two areas: (1) the female quadroon's contempt for her darker brothers, (2) the tragic, or better, the melodramatic ending of the affairs. Her tendency to make sweeping generalizations based on hearsay evidence is deplorable. Such statements as "Every young man early selects one [a quadroon mistress] . . ." is beneath comment as is the first sentence of the passage which follows:

The Quadroon connexions in New Orleans are all but universal, as I was assured on the spot by ladies who cannot be mistaken. The history of such connexions is a melancholy one: but it ought to be made known while there are many who boast of the superior morals of New Orleans, on account of the decent quietness of the streets and the theatres.

The Quadroon girls of New Orleans are brought up

³³ Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), Vol. 1, p. 263.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 276.

³⁵ Harriet Martineau, Society in America (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837).

by their mothers to be what they have been; the mistresses of white gentlemen. The boys are some of them sent to France; some placed on land in the back of the State; and some are sold in the slave-market. They marry women of a somewhat darker colour than their own; the women of their own color objecting to them, "ils sont se dégoûtants [sic]!" The girls are highly educated externally, and are, probably, as beautiful and accomplished a set of women as can be found. Every young man early selects one, and establishes her in one of those pretty and peculiar houses, whole rows of which may be seen in the Remparts. The connexions now and then lasts for life; usually for several years. In the latter case, when the time comes for the white partner to take a white wife, the dreadful news reaches his Quadroon partner, either by a letter entitling her to call the house and furniture her own, or by the newspaper which announces his marriage. The Quadroon ladies are rarely or never known to form a second connexion. Many commit suicide: more die broken hearted. Some men continue the connexion after marriage. Every Quadroon woman believes that her partner will prove an exception to the rule of desertion. Every white lady believes that her husband has been an exception to the rule of seduction.³⁶

Five years before the Civil War, Frederick L. Olmstead wrote his views as a rabid abolitionist. He attempted, among other things, to define the different racial mixtures and he became hopelessly confused and contradictory.³⁷ Moreau de Saint-Méry, on whom Cable depended,³⁸ probably started this tradition of long, confusing and contradictory listings of

³⁶Ibid., p. 117.

³⁷Frederick L. Olmstead, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), p. 583.

³⁸Turner, G. W. Cable, p. 229.

racial mixtures.³⁹ Olmstead's views were essentially those of Saxe-Weimar and the ladies already cited:

The girls are frequently sent to Paris to be educated, and are very accomplished. They are generally pretty, and often handsome. I have rarely, if ever, met more beautiful women, than one or two of them, that I saw by chance, in the streets. They are much better formed, and have a much more graceful and elegant carriage than Americans in general, while they seem to have commonly inherited or acquired much of the taste and skill in the selection and arrangement, and the way of wearing dresses and ornaments, that is the especial distinction of the women of Paris.⁴⁰

Olmstead was one of the few writers to extol the financial advantages to the white man in the system of plaçage. He acquired a thrifty housekeeper and a laundress as well as a mistress, and all at a very low price.⁴¹

An 1835 visitor, G. W. Featherstonhaugh, followed the established patterns in his description of the four days he spent in New Orleans. The city was uninteresting and, in addition, given to the worship of mammon:

Having gratified my curiosity until I had not the slightest desire to remain an hour longer, I took leave of New Orleans--a city where all agree in the

³⁹ Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue (Blanche Maurel and Etienne Taillemite editors, 3 volumes; 2nd edition; Paris: Librairie Larose, 1958), Vol. 1, pp. 83-111.

⁴⁰ Olmstead, op. cit., p. 594.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 598.

worship of mammon, and where the undertaker looks with as much periodical anxiety to the season of his harvest as the speculator in cotton does to his.⁴²

He did see one encouraging sign:

I was gratified however to find that the Anglo-episcopal church was raising its head here.

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Men of liberal education and correct lives in the United States seem naturally to fall into the bosom of the episcopal church, for there they find that attractive order of worship and steadiness of purpose which so powerfully encourage them to persevere in that purity of life which generally distinguishes individuals in their class.⁴³

Harnett Kane drew heavily from his description of the beginning of a quadron liaison:⁴⁴

The Quadroon balls are places to which these young creatures are taken as soon as they have reached womanhood, and there they show their accomplishments in dancing and conversation to the white men, who alone frequent the places. When one of them attracts the attention of an admirer, and he is desirous of forming a liaison with her, he makes a bargain with the mother, agrees to pay her a sum of money, perhaps 2000 dollars, or some sum in proportion to her merits, as a fund upon which she may retire when the liaison terminates. She is now called "une placée"; those of her caste who are intimate friends give her fetes, and the lover prepares "un joli appartement bien meublé." With the sole exception of "going to church," matters are conducted very much as if a marriage had been celebrated; the

⁴²George William Featherstonhaugh, Excursion Through the Slave States (London: John Murray, 1844), Vol. II, p. 271.

⁴³Ibid., p. 270.

⁴⁴Harnett T. Kane, Queen New Orleans: City of the River (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1949), pp. 192-93.

lady is removed to her establishment, has her little coterie of female friends, frequents their "Bals de Société," and brings up sons to be rejected by the society where the father finds his equals, with daughters to be educated for the Quadroon balls, and destined to pursue the same career which the mother has done. Of course it frequently happens that the men get tired of them and form new liaisons; when this happens they return to their mothers or fall back upon the fund provided for them in that case; and in some instances I was informed that various families of daughters by the same father appear at the Quadroon ball on the very evenings when their legitimate brother is present for the purpose of following the example of his worthy Papa.⁴⁵

For all his reliance on second-hand information, this visitor did at least see quadroons. He was acutely disappointed. They were not as white as the whites and they were obviously Negroid in appearance:

The French theatre [Théâtre d'Orléans] is in fact an opera-house, and appeared to be very well conducted: few ladies were there the evening I visited it, and those I saw were not remarkable for their ton or personal beauty, of which I had heard a great deal, the Quadroon Creoles having been somewhat extravagantly described to me as females beautiful beyond all others, and very conspicuous for "une belle taille, et une gorge magnifique." I had occasion to see a good many of them during my stay, at a ball or two I had access to; and certainly it must be allowed that they are "bien mises," and carry their persons very well; but in the lips and mouth, and in an unpleasing coarse texture of the skin, the negro blood shows itself very distinctly.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Featherstonhaugh, op. cit., pp. 268-69.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 265-66.

James Stuart, a Scotsman who was in New Orleans in March and April of 1830, was more favorably inclined than most toward that city: "Excepting only the appearance of lottery offices and billiard-rooms, vice is much more prominent in London, and even in Edinburgh, and, I suspect, in most of the European cities than at New Orleans."⁴⁷ The absence of street-walkers was noteworthy:

It is a striking fact in the manner of the people of the American cities, and is very much to their credit, that there is no appearance of women of light character upon any of the public streets at any time, either of the day or night.⁴⁸

Stuart took exception to the critics such as Saxe-Weimar who suggested that Louisiana was not loyal to the Union:

On the contrary, I am persuaded that in the states to which I have alluded, and above all in Louisiana, there never at any period was more general, or more sincere devotedness to the American constitution. The people universally considered the government as the cheapest, the most effective, and the freest in the world.⁴⁹

The stories of nubile quadroons promenading along the levee under the watchful eyes of their shrewd mothers trying

⁴⁷James Stuart, Three Years in North America (Edinburgh: Robert Caldwell, 1833), p. 237.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 238.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 247.

to effect a placage were discounted:⁵⁰

The tales which have been told of the assemblage of beauties on the levee at sunset, where the mother or female relation makes the best bargain she can for her daughter or her ward, are, I am quite satisfied, merely traveller's stories.⁵¹

Another visitor who took exception to the general view was Isidore Löwenstern who visited in 1837. Like James Stuart, he found the quadroons decidedly Negroid:

Toutes ces dames mettaient autant de soin à cacher la couleur provenant du sang maternel qu'à faire ressortir la ressemblance qu'elles tenaient de leurs pères, et, pour cela, elles s'étaient appliqué sur le visage et la gorge une bonne dose de poudre blanche, qui faisait un effet singulier, quand la danse, dont elles s'acquittent fort bien, et avec beaucoup de grâce, les avait échauffées.⁵²

Charles Gayarré did an historical sketch of the quadroons in 1890 when he was eighty-five years old.⁵³ This slight sketch (15 pages in the rough draft and 19 pages in the second draft) is disappointing. Gayarré had lived through the period and should have given a better picture. He refrains from

⁵⁰ The levee was no place for respectable people at that period. It was frequented only by the canaille.

⁵¹ Stuart, op. cit., p. 237.

⁵² Isidore Löwenstern, Les Etats-Unis et la Havane-Souvenir d'un Voyageur (Paris: Arthur Bertrand, 1842), p. 303.

⁵³ Charles Gayarré, "The Quadroons of Louisiana" (unpublished manuscript in the Gayarre Collection of Louisiana State University Library).

sensationalism, but on the other hand, he devotes too much time to anecdotal material attempting to prove that the quadroon's lot was not a bad one. He had a special interest in quadroons, as he, himself, had succumbed to the wiles of one. He fathered the child of Delphine Le Maître.⁵⁴ Socola cited in the semi-autobiographical Fernando de Lemos a passage which tells of a young man's indiscretion.⁵⁵ The son, a young man of unexemplary character, used his father's name. A former suitor of his father's fiancée sent her a copy of a court record of one of the young quadroon's escapades. The name was the same and there was no identifying f.m.c. (free man of color) after it. The young lady assumed it was the father and broke her engagement without explanation. She married the suitor who had perpetrated the fraud. His happiness was short-lived, as she died soon after learning the truth. It might be noted that this same story with different names appears in the unpublished "Quadroons of Louisiana." Gayarré did, in fact, marry late in life--possibly as a result of such an indiscretion. In any case, the baptismal record of a quadroon son

⁵⁴Edward M. Socola, "Charles E.A. Gayarré, A Biography" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, American Civilization, University of Pennsylvania, 1954), p. 320.

⁵⁵Charles Gayarré, Fernando de Lemos (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1872), pp. 153-56.

of Gayarré was identified by Socola.⁵⁶ Two men bearing the name Charles Gayarré appeared in city directories for many years--one the historian, the other an artisan in various crafts.⁵⁷

In his historical sketch the venerable judge offered an explanation of the possible origin of the system:

There was a reason for the prevalence of this sort of left-handed connubial arrangement which we are compelled to touch upon, and we will attempt it with as much delicacy as possible. In those days such houses of evil repute as existed in other cities, and have been tolerated in consequence of a social impurity with which it has been thought necessary to compromise, were unknown in New Orleans. The first white woman, professionally corrupt, who came from the North, produced a sensation in that city. It was an astonishing novelty. The increase of them subsequently led to greater and more occult immorality with consequences more fatal to the health and habits of sobriety and self respect.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, Gayarré, a fervent believer in the superiority of the white race, implied that the whites were probably doing the quadroons a favor by this system of concubinage:

. . . a white woman in those days would hardly have consented to such a frail and illegal union, which would have been social degradation to her, whilst it was social elevation to the quadroon. As to the Caucasian magnate, he thought that he incurred less

⁵⁶Socola, op. cit., p. 320.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 321.

⁵⁸Gayarré, "The Quadroons of Louisiana," loc. cit., p. 15.

responsibilities; probably he felt, as a noble of the feudal age might have done, that he was merely condescending to amuse himself with his village vassals, and gave no very great offense to the Lady in the Castle, to whom he had accounts to render.⁵⁹

Gayarré's condescending and cavalier attitude was borne out by his action, as we have noted.

Miss Duchein, whose thesis we have already cited, thought that this system of concubinage resulted from the loveless mariage de convenance then in vogue.⁶⁰

Gayarré reiterated a point already made in a newspaper article.⁶¹ He definitely excluded the Orleans Theatre ballroom (once part of the convent of a Negro community and recently restored as part of an apartment hotel) as the site of quadroom balls. There was such a ballroom at the corner of Bourbon and Orleans streets, but it had disappeared long before Gayarré did his 1890 sketch. To this very day tourists are told that these nuns were expiating the sins of their quadroom forebears.⁶²

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁰Duchein, op. cit., p. 148.

⁶¹The Daily Picayune (New Orleans), December 18, 1886.

⁶²Perhaps such nonsense as this was one of the reasons that prompted the city of New Orleans to move to license tourist guides in December, 1965.

The historical novelists Lyle Saxton and Harnett Kane could not refrain from perpetuating the myth in the works already cited. Dr. Albert E. Fossier, whose history of early nineteenth century New Orleans is the best thus far, was just as positive as Gayarré on this point:

The balls of the social set of New Orleans were always held at Davis' theater and ball room [Théâtre d'Orléans], situated on Orleans St., between Royal and Bourbon. Part of the original building is now occupied by the sisters of the Holy Family Convent. The myth that this was the site where the notorious quadroom balls were held should be exploded.⁶³

A few more lines from this same author might help to restore our perspective which has been distorted by travelers' tales and legends:

The quadrooms of New Orleans did not consort with poets or artists; they were activated by more sordid considerations--the quest of ease and prestige which only money could procure. Their names have not been engraved in bronze, inscribed on marble or immortalized in verse. In fact their fame ended in the grave. They were exhibited on a flimsy pedestal which crumbled with their fading youth. As individuals, they are practically unknown today.⁶⁴

With the exception of Madame de la Houssaye, one cannot recall a single writer who has left us the name of one of these "reines de l'époque," as she called them. Her frequent

⁶³Fossier, op. cit., p. 458.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 356.

references to newspaper coverage of the activities of the quadroons is also at variance with Dr. Fossier, who tells us that: "The local press was practically silent on the subject, and any mention was derogatory and generally concerned with the ribaldry which took place at their balls."⁶⁵ Harnett Kane said virtually the same thing.⁶⁶ My own research confirms this. Dr. Fossier summarized the travelers' accounts:

All were foreigners, who visited New Orleans for only a few days, and who frankly admitted that some of their reports were based on hearsay. They were confronted with a racial question, such as they had never met before, and they poured out all their sympathy for these people of lighter color by extolling their virtues and extravagantly praising their beauty.⁶⁷

Of all the travelers, only Olmstead⁶⁸ and Löwenstern⁶⁹ made the obvious point that these women were not fair complexioned and indistinguishable from the whites. Had they been so Caucasian in appearance, there would have been no problem--they would have simply passed for white:

That they all had a fair skin, more pale than those of pure white blood, and that they were more

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 357.

⁶⁶Kane, op. cit., p. 191.

⁶⁷Fossier, op. cit., p. 358.

⁶⁸Olmstead, op. cit., p. 583.

⁶⁹Löwenstern, op. cit., p. 303.

educated than the ladies of the social set, possessing a far superior elegance, poise and social grace, as well as possessing great wealth, is pure fiction. Again it must be repeated that the majority of the women of color were respectable, moral and virtuous⁷⁰ who did not condone the profligacy of their sisters.

Those who spoke so highly of the quadroons' education were simply not conversant with the unpleasant realities of the day:

. . . the educational facilities for both boys and girls, were neglected and greatly limited in scope, even for the whites. As for the black race, there were no schools. In fact, to teach Negroes to read was against the law. The only way a quadroon could be educated, man or woman, was to be sent to the North or to Europe. . . .⁷¹

It is little wonder that Gayarré wrote: "It [the quadroon subject] has of late become a favorite subject of novelists [e.g., Cable], who, as they generally do, convey false impressions . . . in such of their works of fiction as purport to be based on history."⁷²

Earlier writers, too, exploited this theme. Joseph Holt Ingraham, who was patently unfamiliar with his subject,

⁷⁰Fossier, op. cit., p. 364.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 364.

⁷²Gayarré, "The Quadroons of Louisiana," loc. cit., p. 1, rough draft.

wrote the Quadroone or St. Michael's Day in 1841.⁷³ In the following year, Louis Tassistro, a sometimes harsh critic of New Orleans, saw fit to warn his readers of Ingraham's work: ". . . when it [the Quadroone] comes to assume the importance and dignity of an historical romance, it is altogether unworthy of the consideration of the critics."⁷⁴ He further added: "The Quadroone is written in direct opposition to all the principles which are held essential to historical fiction. The writer labours to illustrate a fabulous event, not a real period in the history of the South. . . ."⁷⁵

Captain Wayne Reid of the dime novel school wrote The Quadroon: A Lover's Adventure in Louisiana in 1856.⁷⁶ He opened his preface with these words: "Reader! a word with you before starting. This book is a romance--nothing more."⁷⁷ Irish-born Dion Bouccicault took it more seriously and

⁷³ Joseph Holt Ingraham, The Quadroone or St. Michael's Day (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841).

⁷⁴ Louis Fitzgerald Tassistro, Random Shots and Southern Breezes (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1842), Vol. I, p. 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷⁶ Wayne Reid, The Quadroon: A Lover's Adventure in Louisiana (New York: Robert M. DeWitt, 1856).

⁷⁷ Ibid., preface.

borrowed the outlines of the plot for a play.⁷⁸ The Octoroon of maudlin inspiration and turgid prose, was the result.⁷⁹ Professor Reinders believes that the play was suggested by Bouccicault's one year stay in New Orleans.⁸⁰ It is of interest to note that this play was presented as late as 1965.⁸¹

Given this picture of the quadroon as he really was, we are better prepared to evaluate the quadroon in our author's work.

Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans

Closer to our author's time were Cable's "'Tite Poulette" and Madame Delphine, dating from 1874 and 1881 respectively. It is not unlikely that his success with these publications prompted Madame de la Houssaye to try to emulate him. The Quarteronnes series was begun in August, 1885 to comply with Mr. Scribner's

⁷⁸Arthur Hobson Quinn (ed.), Representative American Plays from 1767 to the Present Day (Seventh edition, Revised and Enlarged; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), p. 372.

⁷⁹Dion Bouccicault, The Octoroon (New York: Samuel French, 1859).

⁸⁰Robert C. Reinders, End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860 (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964), p. 221.

⁸¹Excerpts were given on November 4, 1965 in New Orleans for the postprandial entertainment of members of the South Central Modern Language Association.

request for Louisiana sketches. In the early part of that month she sent him three songs and an unidentified conte nègre. Not satisfied with this meagre offering, she turned again to her trunks. Her Pandora's box was not wanting on this occasion:

Mr. Charles Scribner de New York, m'ayant demandé des esquisses louisianaises, j'ai encore cherché dans les vieilles malles et y ai trouvé un rouleau sur lequel le mot quarteronnes était écrit et j'essaie de traduire [corriger] deux de ces récits pour Mr. Scribner.⁸²

She did not say so in this letter, but the references to translation, rouleau, and vieilles malles clearly imply that she was trying to give the impression that she was again re-working her grandmother's material. Only two récits are mentioned at this point; the completed series comprised four novels.

Over four years later she would say that Placide Canonge of L'Abeille had advised and encouraged her in the project: "C'est après le conseil de Mr. Placide Canonge que j'entrepris d'écrire Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans. Il me donna quelques avis et m'aida même dans mes recherches."⁸³

Whatever the actual genesis of the series may have

⁸²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 23, 1885.

⁸³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

been, the work progressed rapidly in the beginning. On August 6, 1885, she wrote Cable and did not mention Les Quarteronnes. Her next letter on August 23, 1885 had references to the work in progress. Octavie la quarteronne was finished in French less than three weeks later:⁸⁴ "Je viens de terminer, comme histoire Louisianaise Octavie la quarteronne. Elle est entre les mains de ma traductrice. ..."85

Octavia was a very short work in published form. It contained only sixty-seven small, double column pages.⁸⁶ Our author said that this récit was far easier than "Claire," which she had just finished, because her grandmother had taken so much of it from newspapers of the day: "Octavie m'a donné moins de peine, car elle [la grand'mère] a copié une bonne partie de ce récit sur les différents journaux de l'époque."⁸⁷ Later we will have occasion to challenge this statement.

Octavia was sent to Mr. Scribner on October 16, 1885.

⁸⁴The published version was called not Octavie, but Octavia. It and all of the series, appeared under the pseudonym of Louise Raymond.

⁸⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

⁸⁶Louise Raymond, Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Première Partie: Octavia la Quarteronne (Bonnet Carré, La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1894).

⁸⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 22, 1885.

"Claire" had been forwarded on August 29, 1885. Madame de la Houssaye wrote to Cable on September 22, 1885 and did not write again until December 15. Between her September and December letters, Cable wrote to the publisher and declared the two works "shocking" and "with no literary value." He advised that the two be bought "at a trifle" for use as historical data only.⁸⁸ Scribner, who would not have published "Claire" under any conditions, expressed some interest in the Quarteronnes series:

Il [Scribner] m'avait demandé des histoires créoles pensant que ce qui représenterait mieux les moeurs créoles d'autrefois, serait une série des histoires des quelques unes de ces quarteronnes, qui, comme une lèpre, ont désolé la Nelle Orléans pendant tant d'années par leur luxe insensé et leur conduite licencieuse.⁸⁹

Her original plan called for a series of three stories:

J'ai bien cherché pour me procurer trois de ces histoires. J'ai trouvé bien des faits, des copies des gazettes, des notes, dans les papiers de ma grand'mère. Ma mère âgée de près de 84 ans, m'a raconté bien des choses de son côté.⁹⁰

It was not until March, 1887 that she mentioned a series of four stories: "Vous qui aimez les histoires créoles, devriez

⁸⁸Letter from G. W. Cable to Charles Scribner, November 16, 1885.

⁸⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, December 15, 1885.

⁹⁰Ibid.

lire mes quarteronnes (j'y travaille à present). Le fond de ces 4 histoires est vrai."⁹¹ In a November, 1889 letter she listed the stories as they appeared in print. Octavia had been rejected by Lippincott and by Laird & Lee of Chicago: "Violetta est entre les mains du traducteur--restent Gina et Dahlia."⁹² Violetta is the story of a quadroon who became dévoté. Gina and Dahlia tell of quadroons who found asylum and happiness in France.

In her thesis Miss Savoie spoke of five stories in Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans. She based this on a letter to Mme de la Houssaye from her publisher,⁹³ Charles Lasseigne, which mentioned a work called Uhlán. The reference followed some details on publication of the Quarteronnes:

"La langue française est bien ingrate pour les journalistes en Louisiane: elle ne leur rapporte plus rien. Envoyez-moi quand même Uhlán, je tâcherai d'en tirer le meilleur parti possible."⁹⁴ It was this reference to Uhlán that led Miss Savoie to assume that it was part of the

⁹¹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1889.

⁹²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

⁹³Savoie, op. cit., p. 90.

⁹⁴Cited in Savoie, op. cit.

Quarteronnes. Uhlán is not mentioned elsewhere, either by our author or by any critic. The name has a distinctively masculine ring and, in fact, refers to a type of German lancer. A line in Octavia apropos of the names the girls usually chose would also seem to preclude such a name in the series: "Quant à leur premier nom, il se terminait presque toujours par un a: c'était Augusta, Antonia, Dahlia, Violetta, Gina, etc."⁹⁵

Madame de la Houssaye maintained that these "historical" works composed over a three year period, were based on her grandmother's notes, newspapers of the day, interviews with vieillards, and her own additional research. The expressions "étude de mœurs," "roman de mœurs," and "esquisse de mœurs" were applied to this series. She readily admitted that they were shocking stories:

... j'avoue qu'elles [les quarteronnes] n'étaient pas des Saints ces courtisanes de bas étage--mais leur histoire, prise en partie dans les papiers de ma grand'mère, dans des journaux de 1820 qui m'ont été prêtés par un ami, est une excellente étude des mœurs de l'époque.⁹⁶

She repeated this in substance a few months later:

⁹⁵De la Houssaye, Octavia, p. 25.

⁹⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1886.

"Le fond de ces 4 histoires est vrai. C'est licencieux, immoral, demi-monde. ..." ⁹⁷ The author was just as insistent on the authenticity of the work: "... après toutes les peines que je me suis donné [sic] pour Les Quarteronnes de la Nelle Orléans, après en avoir fait un roman de moeurs de l'époque, un roman historique, je ne puis trouver un éditeur. ..." ⁹⁸

She adhered to this position in her last two letters to Cable:

Je consacrai trois années à la composition de cet ouvrage, je ne puis vous dire toutes les peines que je me suis données, toutes les recherches que j'ai faites pour donner de la valeur à mon oeuvre qui, d'après l'avis de Mr. Canonge et d'autres messieurs haut placés dans notre littérature, a été couronnée de succès. Ils avouent que c'est une excellente esquisse des moeurs créoles de l'époque. Seulement ces quarteronnes qui alors étaient les véritables reines de la Nelle Orléans avaient une conduite très scandaleuse; et voilà pourquoi jusqu'à présent je n'ai pu trouver un éditeur. L'horrible drame raconté dans Octavia, et vrai dans tous ses détails, a excité l'horreur des éditeurs américains qui cependant ne rougissent pas de traduire et de publier les indécences d'Emile Zola. J'ai trouvé quelques incidents de la vie de ces quarteronnes dans les papiers de ma grand'mère, d'autres m'ont été racontés par des vieillards, entr'autres ma tante Suzanne [Bossier]. Un vieux monsieur m'a prêté quelques vieux journaux qui m'ont bien aidée. ⁹⁹

Her last letter was in the same tenor:

Il y a quelques jours je reçus la visite d'un

⁹⁷Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1887.

⁹⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 18, 1889.

⁹⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, November 9, 1889.

vieil ami, d'un homme dont l'intelligence et l'instruction sont admirées de tout le monde. Il a lu mes quarteronnes, un véritable roman de moeurs créoles, et savez-vous ce qu'il m'a dit? "Si Cable se chargerait de traduire cet ouvrage, ce serait certainement une fortune pour vous deux." Je me suis donné bien de la peine pour écrire cette histoire, fouillé les vieux papiers, questionné les vieillards, voyagé même et je crois avoir bien rendu une époque pleine d'incidents intéressants. ... Soyez bien sûr qu'il y a de l'argent à gagner dans ces quarteronnes; le tout est de trouver un éditeur qui ne soit pas trop effrayé des moeurs de cette époque, car les quarteronnes n'étaient pas des saints, loin de là!¹⁰⁰

The author well knew, therefore, she was treating a controversial subject and she must have anticipated the stormy reception that the first part (Octavia) was to receive. (It is not known if Octavia was published before her death. The three other stories were published after her death.) Professor Broussard said: "The appearance of the first book stirred a cloud of protest."¹⁰¹ No contemporary evidence has been found to substantiate his statement. This impression is, however, firmly imbedded in oral tradition and will remain so until positive evidence to the contrary is produced. Tinker thought that the subject was so daring that she had to use the pseudonym of Louise Raymond: "Elle les jugeait si osées

¹⁰⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, January 21, 1890.

¹⁰¹Broussard, L.S.U. Alumni News, February, 1937, p. 23.

qu'elle les signait d'un pseudonyme 'Louise Raymond.'"102 We have already suggested that her position in Franklin was so sensitive after the publication of her January, 1887 letter on poverty in town that she dared not sign a work that would shock her neighbors no less than her letter had done. This explanation is only partially satisfactory. It is predicated on the assumption that her neighbors did not read books past the title page. There are more than enough allusions to members of her family and to her grandmother's trip to make this explanation unacceptable. Anyone reading Violetta would be exposed to pages of our author's genealogy.¹⁰³ We can assume only that she thought her neighbors were not readers or that she had grown indifferent to their protests.

Critics, no less than authors and readers, have been attracted by the quadroons. In the case of our author, there is some divergence of opinion. A summary of the main criticism will serve to introduce the works themselves and this writer's appraisal of them.

Tinker, who was confused about the composition and order of these works when he wrote over thirty years

¹⁰²Tinker, op. cit., p. 111.

¹⁰³Louise Raymond, Violetta (Bonnet Carré, La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1895), pp. 87 ff.

ago,¹⁰⁴ has a facetious comment and little more:

Les descriptions de la "vie d'intérieur" de ces jolie femmes de couleur sont curieusement ingénues et reflètent l'opinion du jour, à savoir que la force d'une femme, comme celle de Samson, réside dans une longue chevelure et que les tresses dénouées et flottant sont l'excitant le plus violent de la passion chez l'homme;--théorie évidemment fantaisiste, puisque les têtes tondues des femmes de nos jours [1933] sont tout aussi capables d'enflammer les hommes.¹⁰⁵

His sentence is strange indeed. Madame de la Houssaye did not suggest that their hair was the principal attraction of these tawny sirens. Even if she had said such a thing, she would have been on sure ground. Who could forget Baudelaire's dithyrambic apostrophe to the tresses of his own "Vénus noire," Jeanne Duval?¹⁰⁶

Tinker's last comment on the Quarteronnes is a logical, if inaccurate, conclusion based on the evidence available to him: "Il est curieux de voir cette femme âgée, très respectable, mère de quatorze enfants [six enfants et huit petits

¹⁰⁴In 1963, Tinker sent incomplete copies of Gina and Dahlia to the Louisiana State University Library. Neither of these stories was seen by the public in book form. Both, however, were printed, but left unbound. Tinker collected these unbound pages years after the death of Charles Lasseigne, the publisher. Vide, Tinker, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁰⁵Tinker, op. cit., p. 111.

¹⁰⁶Charles Baudelaire, "La Chevelure" in Les Fleurs du Mal, Spleen et idéal.

enfants], maîtresse d'école pendant la plus grande partie de sa vie, écrire de pareilles choses."¹⁰⁷ Now that some of her correspondence is available, we find that Les Quarteronnes does not represent a radical departure for our author.

Of the earlier critics, Professor Broussard alone perceived a late-flowering naturalism in Madame de la Houssaye:

To me, Madame reached the maturity of her talents when she wrote her quadroom stories. For the first time, she was presenting some "tranches de vie" taken from the vibrant life of her times. She had peeped beyond the life of white-columned plantation homes, beyond the high ceiled parlors with their stiff armchairs, filled with innocent girls in starched skirts. She had followed her men with a knowing eye. She had learned why some of her friends walked stiffly to church with pale cheeks and sunken eyes. She understood the sound of sobbing at night.¹⁰⁸

In her thesis on Gayarré, Miss Duchein had some reservations on the historicity of Les Quarteronnes. She gave long excerpts from Lyle Saxon's romanticized Fabulous New Orleans and ended with his reference to the proverbial innocence of the young ladies of the South, those "priceless jewels of innocence."¹⁰⁹ This gave her the opportunity to offer a dissenting opinion--that of our author:

¹⁰⁷Tinker, op. cit., p. 111.

¹⁰⁸Broussard, loc. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰⁹Duchein, op. cit., p. 125.

The "priceless jewels of innocence" probably knew more than Mr. Saxon--or their fiancés and brothers suspected--if a rare manuscript found by Sidonie de la Houssaye and written by her grandmother can be said to be authentic.¹¹⁰

A series of quotations from Les Quarteronnes follows.

In a later passage Miss Duchein dismisses all fictional accounts and travelers' tales: "It may be of interest to note that try as one may, it is quite impossible to find a sketch of the quadroons which is carefully and truthfully drawn."¹¹¹

In a recent (1961) sociological study of the present status of the descendants of the gens de couleur, one finds praise for our author's work:

A contemporary of Cable at the turn of the century [she died in 1894] is a lesser known Louisiana French writer Madame Sidonie dela Houssaye [sic].

.
Her serial novel, Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans (1894-98), gives a fresh insight into the lives of the quadroons. This novel abounding with details of the social life of the time, has been surprisingly overlooked by popular writers in quest of savory material.¹¹²

Wingfield's praise was not unqualified, however, for

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹²Roland Wingfield, "The Creoles of Color: A Study of a New Orleans Subculture" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Sociology, Louisiana State University, 1961), pp. 12-13.

he wrote in a later chapter following a discussion of the authenticity of the quadroon courtisane's portrait as painted by her and others: "It is impossible to verify the authenticity of her source and the sources of other writers on the subject are equally obscure."¹¹³

There is, perhaps, the greatest divergence of opinion on the scope of Les Quarteronnes.

In a thesis devoted to French literature in Louisiana newspapers, Doris Caffery said this of the series: "The story is filled with romantic and exciting episodes, with a profusion of details and a great many characters. The device of narrating the lives of the characters' children is used to prolong the story."¹¹⁴ References to the characters' children are made, but the action is really focused on a period of less than one generation. (In the introduction to Octavia, the first of the series, our author speaks of finding a manuscript entitled "Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans, de 1800 à 1830.")¹¹⁵ There is no question of a really distinct treatment

¹¹³Ibid., p. 128.

¹¹⁴Doris L. Caffery, "French Literature in Louisiana Country Newspapers: Le Meschacébé, Le Foyer Créole and l'Interim (1880-1899)" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Foreign Languages, Louisiana State University, 1944), p. 88.

¹¹⁵De la Houssaye, Octavia, introduction.

and separation of the generations as, for example, Zola did with L'Assommoir and Nana. Mme de la Houssaye used flashbacks and allusions to the present, but her action is firmly fixed in a period of less than one generation.

Mme Kail, in a generally perspective survey of Louisiana French novelists from 1870 to 1900, deplored the "psychologie simpliste" of the writers of the Louisiana French school:¹¹⁶

Tous les romans ne sont pas des romans d'analyse, me direz-vous. Certes, non, mais la psychologie un peu simpliste des personnages a une conséquence purement littéraire sur l'ouvrage lui-même: ce sont, soit des romans à tableaux, comme Les Quarteronnes, car aucune n'a assez d'étoffe pour former la matière d'un roman à elle toute seule; ou bien ce sont des romans à péripéties dans lesquels l'histoire de héros est fort simple, mais agrémentée d'incidences ou de discussions innombrables ...¹¹⁷

The reference to "romans à tableaux" is somewhat harsh, but not completely inaccurate. As we will later see, Madame de la Houssaye herself talked about quadroon types. This in itself is a tacit admission of "psychologie simpliste." On the other hand, the statement that none of these works has the makings of a novel is simply not true. The author's

¹¹⁶Andrée F. Kail, "Les Romanciers de langue française en Louisiane de 1870 à 1900," Comptes Rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais (November, 1950), p. 10.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

handling of the material was at times less than satisfactory, it is true, but the material was not lacking.

Far easier to reject is M. Auguste Viatte's appellation of roman fleuve as applied to Les Quarteronnes.¹¹⁸ Others have written romans fleuves based on the study of one generation. Jules Romain's Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté and Roger Martin du Gard's Les Thibault come to mind. Compared to the wealth of historical, sociological and psychological material in these later writers, her work is poor indeed. The point is she certainly did not intend to attempt any such grandiose project. She was not aspiring to be the chronicler of an era, the clinical observer of the victims of determinism à la Zola, or even the "secretary of Louisiana society, the historian," in the manner of Balzac. Her hopes were for a commercial success--her protestations of roman de mœurs notwithstanding.

Octavia, the first of the series, was the only recit not published en feuilleton in Le Meschacébé.¹¹⁹ As would be expected in the beginning of the series, the author goes into the genesis of the work:

¹¹⁸Viatte, op. cit., p. 295.

¹¹⁹Facts of publication already given. The manuscript is in loc. cit., Volume VI, pp. 208-91.

Pendant une journée d'orage de l'année 1878, ne sachant que faire de moi-même, j'eus l'idée d'examiner la malle de papiers et de documents qui nous a été léguée par la mère de notre mère et que cette dernière m'a abandonnée.¹²⁰

We note two discrepancies in this passage. From letters already cited we know that she found this material in 1885, not 1878, and we know that Madame de la Houssaye's mother did not abandon the trunk of papers to her.

Another paragraph shortly after this one is equally interesting:

Enfin, au milieu des trésors que je venais de découvrir, au milieu des vieux manuscrits mangés par les mites, je mis la main sur un rouleau attaché d'un ruban (bleu autrefois) et portant cette inscription: "Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans, de 1800 à 1830."¹²¹

Had there actually been such a document, it would have been astounding. Our author's grandmother died in 1828, as we noted in an earlier chapter.

Our author made all haste to read these precious documents. The joy of discovery was tempered by the realization that her grandmother had left only a sketch:

Il faut bien avouer cependant qu'à ce plaisir se mêla une nuance de désappointement: après bien

¹²⁰De la Houssaye, Octavia, introduction.

¹²¹Ibid.

des heures consacrées à déchiffrer les hiéroglyphes d'écriture et d'orthographe que renfermait le précieux rouleau,¹²² je fus forcée de m'avouer que, si je voulais livrer au public l'histoire des Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans, il me fallait faire de nouvelles recherches afin de compléter l'oeuvre esquissée seulement par me grand'mère.¹²³

Her grandmother lived on a peaceful plantation on the Mississippi above New Orleans. She learned of the quadroons from the newspaper accounts. As it was the grandmother's story, she quoted her remarks about the news she received:

... je n'entendais que celles [les nouvelles] que nous portaient les deux journaux de cette époque, et je ne pouvais que blâmer la promptitude avec laquelle ils livraient au public des faits que plus d'une famille aurait bien certainement désiré tenir secrets. Sans scrupule, en mettant seulement une initiale, ils trouvaient moyen de laisser percer les noms de personnes qui ne pouvaient manquer de souffrir de ce manque de délicatesse.¹²⁴

The grandmother's curiosity, however, overcame her scruples and she started to follow the newspaper accounts:

Les journaux ne parlaient que d'elles [les quarteronnes], de leur beauté surnaturelle, de leur luxe ou plutôt de leur extravagance et des folies qui se faisaient pour elles. Et pour moi petite fermière

¹²²This terminology has a familiar ring to the readers of the "How I Got Them" preface to Cable's Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

¹²³De la Houssaye, Octavia, introduction.

¹²⁴Ibid.

compagnarde,¹²⁵ ces récits revêtaient de tout le charme, de tout l'incroyable attachés aux contes féériques des mille et une nuits.¹²⁶

Madame de la Houssaye stressed the role of the press in this period, e.g.: "Les journaux n'étaient remplis que des faits et gestes de ces courtisanes: ils ne parlaient que de leurs réunions, de leurs petits soupers qui rappelaient, disaient-ils, ceux de la Régence."¹²⁷

This last quotation and the paragraph cited before it are completely without foundation as was Harriet Martineau's statement that the quadroon's first news of the end of an affair was often a wedding announcement in the newspaper.¹²⁸ For example Fossier states categorically: "A thorough search of the journals fails to reveal, except on a very rare occasion, announcements of marriage. They simply did not have a society column at that time."¹²⁹ My own research led me to the same conclusion. The newspapers of that period were devoted to business and news bulletins. It should not, however,

¹²⁵ A startling transformation. In the *Voyage de ma grand'mère* and "Chattanooga," for example, she was quite cosmopolitan.

¹²⁶ De la Houssaye, *Octavia*, introduction.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Martineau, *Society in America*, p. 117.

¹²⁹ Fossier, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

be implied from this that our author was completely ignorant of the content of the early newspapers. She unquestionably had a few scattered copies of newspapers from the first decades of the century. Her memory was not clear on what she actually had. In a July, 1889 letter, she noted that two old newspapers, among other things, were not returned to her after the 1885 exposition in New Orleans: "J'ai perdu en même temps les deux 1^{rs} numéros du Courrier (éditeur St. Romme) 1 8 2 4 (je crois) mais bien vieux."¹³⁰ (C. de St. Romes was editor of Le Courrier in 1824, but the paper was founded in 1807.)

References to 1820 newspapers will be noted in the texts. Allusions to theatrical performances and prominent citizens are apparently based on old newspapers. References to quadroons and their lovers are figments of the novelist's imagination. Her comments on the beauty and grace of the quadroons remind the reader of Mrs. Trollope's earlier description based on hearsay: ". . . educated with all of style and accomplishments which money can procure at New Orleans; exquisitely beautiful, graceful, gentle, and amiable. . . ."¹³¹

¹³⁰Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 13, 1889.

¹³¹Trollope, op. cit., p. 32.

... je dois avouer que toutes celles que j'ai connues,¹³² aussi bien celles dont j'ai entendu parler, étaient à peu d'exception, belles d'une beauté idéale. Leur grâce n'avait point d'égale: elle débordait dans leurs moindres mouvements.

Tout en elles, depuis le charmant dandinement qu'elles savent donner à leur marche, jusqu'au doux parler créole dont elles ne se départaient jamais dans leur intérieur, tout était empreint d'une volupté et d'un charme impossible à décrire.¹³³ A côté de ces créatures, les véritables reines de l'époque, les femmes blanches étaient forcées de demeurer dans l'ombre et étaient entièrement négligées par ceux qui leur devaient aide, amour et protection.¹³⁴

After these generalities on the quadroons, we are led into a digressionary episode involving the son of the grandmother's neighbor. An observant reader would note that the grandmother is now living in St. John the Baptist Parish.¹³⁵ No explanation is offered for this change. In the stories sold to Cable she was living in St. James Parish. Doubtlessly, our author's knowledge of her family history improved in the interval.

¹³²What contact, with the exception of newspapers, a "petite fermière compagne" could have with a New Orleans courtisane is not clear.

¹³³The too frequent recourse to phrases on the order of "impossible à décrire" suggests a lack of familiarity with material she pretended to know.

¹³⁴De la Houssaye, Octavia, p. 2.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 4.

Charles Rennes, the son of the grandmother's neighbor, made occasional business trips to New Orleans. On one such trip, a friend took him to a quadron ball. His natural reserve vanished at the sight of Adoréah, the quadron:

Il est inutile d'essayer de donner une idée de cette beauté magique. Ceux qui ne l'ont pas vu n'y croiraient pas. Elle était certainement plus belle que Cléopâtre et même que la fameuse Hélène; tout était perfection chez cette jeune fille. De ses grands yeux veloutés et brillants comme deux diamants noirs, s'échappait un fluide magnétique qui attirait vers elle non seulement tous les yeux, mais tous les coeurs.¹³⁶

The description is completely vague and conventional.

The author indicates that his reaction was equally vague:

"Il m'est impossible de donner une idée de l'extase qui, de plus en plus, s'emparait de ses sens!"¹³⁷ Young Charles

Rennes was told that Adoréah's real name was Jeannette and that she was the daughter of Mrs. Percy's slave Angélique.

His downfall followed a predictable pattern. Adoréah asked him for a diamond necklace displayed in a Royal St. store

window.¹³⁸ This was no ordinary diamond necklace, but the

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 4.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 14.

very one that figured in the "affaire du collier!"¹³⁹ To get this necklace Adoréah employed all the wiles known to her legendary cast, including the intimate "petits soupers":

... personne, pas même Althéa [sœur d'Adoréah], n'était présent à ce petit souper où l'audacieuse courtisane, oubliant tout respect d'elle-même, toute modestie, accabla son compagnon de ses caresses les plus voluptueuses et l'enivra, non seulement en lui versant les vins les plus capiteux, mais en lui prodiguant à la fois ses sourires fascinateurs et ses regards remplis de passion brutale et d'une volupté à laquelle Charles n'était guère habitué.¹⁴⁰

Charles yielded to Adoreah's charms and forged a note in his father's name: "Oh! comme en cet instant il se souvint des conseils d'Henri Laroque [qui l'avait conseillé de se méfier des quarteronnes]!"¹⁴¹ A note from his father reminded him that a mortgage note was due the next day and that payments had always been on time in the family. Charles, overwhelmed by the dishonor he would bring to his family, shot himself in

¹³⁹ This 1784 scandal involved the Cardinal de Rohan who was duped by the Comtesse de la Motte into giving a valuable necklace to an accomplice impersonating Marie Antoinette. The Cardinal sought the Queen's good graces, but this incident embarrassed the court and caused his disgrace and that of the Comtesse de la Motte as well. The necklace was subsequently sold piecemeal. Dumas père wrote a novel (L'Affaire du collier) about this scheme.

¹⁴⁰ De la Houssaye, Octavia, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 22.

the head. His mother dropped dead when apprised of the facts. Public indignation against Adoréah rose to a high pitch, but was dissipated just as quickly.

Three months later Octavia and Alfred D____, a young lawyer, are the center of attention. Octavia's father had been Spanish and the paternal blood clearly marked her features:

... jamais, en la regardant, on se fût douté qu'elle avait du sang noir dans les veines. Je dois avouer cependant qu'elle était brune, bien plus brune que quelques-unes des autres quarteronnes, mais ses traits fins et délicats donnaient à l'olive clair de son teint le véritable type espagnol.¹⁴²

Octavia's decidedly non-Negroid appearance reminds us of the idealized portraits of the travelers. Atypical in appearance, she was also atypical in conduct. While her sisters literally sold themselves to the highest bidder, she was different in that she actually loved her entreteneur:

... mais il est à supposer qu'il n'en était pas de même d'Octavia et qu'elle format une exception à la règle générale. Elle adorait Alfred D-, il était son idole, et pour le suivre, eût-ce été en Patagonie ou en Sibérie, elle aurait volontiers abandonné tout le luxe et la splendeur dont il l'entourait.¹⁴³

She had followed him to Europe where she was introduced as his wife. Upon his return Alfred, now thirty years old, was growing bored with Octavia. He had become infatuated with his

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

young cousin Angèle, but her father, the elderly Dr. Verdier, would not hear of marriage until Alfred made a definite break with his mistress. He promised to settle his affairs with Octavia and terminate the liaison. His uncle suggested that the newly-weds leave for Europe immediately after the wedding. Dr. Verdier feared the quadroon's vengeance:

... j'ai été soldat dans ma jeunesse et j'ai vu la mort se dresser bien souvent devant moi. Je ne crains ni Dieu ni diable, mais j'avoue à ma honte que j'ai peur des empoisonneuses nègres, de leurs charmes et de leurs gris-gris et que je tremble au nom des Voudoux.¹⁴⁴

Alfred was not so impressionable; he went to Octavia's luxuriously furnished house where he expected little opposition to his decision. Octavia's residence had all of the common luxuries except cut flowers: "Octavia n'aimait pas les fleurs dont, disait-elle, le parfum l'incommodait."¹⁴⁵ This striking resemblance to a more famous courtisane is probably not accidental. Marguerite Gautier in La Dame Aux Camélias could tolerate only the camellia, because "Les parfums me rendent malade."¹⁴⁶ (It is more than a coincidence that the next

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁶Alexandre Dumas fils, Le Dame Aux Camélias, Act I, Scene V.

quadroon story is called Violetta--the name of the operatic counterpart in La Traviata of Dumas films' heroine.)

Octavia greeted Alfred in the "doux parler Créole" and upbraided him for not visiting her.

"Co faire to pas vini hier au soir? mo pas courri dans litte, mo attende toi toute la nuitte ... Mo pé mouri envie dormi! Ah! vilain coquin que to yé!"¹⁴⁷ [Standard French translation: Pourquoi n'es-tu pas venu hier soir? Je ne me suis pas couchée et je t'ai attendu toute la nuit. Je suis en train de mourir d'envie de dormir. Ah! vilain coquin que tu es!]

She became enraged when she learned the nature of his visit. Her reaction was not surprising: "Every quadroon woman believes that her partner will prove an exception to the rule of desertion."¹⁴⁸ Alfred was not an exception. Octavia's love turned to hatred and plans for revenge:

Tremble pour celle à qui tu veux donner ma place!
et souviens-toi, Alfred D- que je suis la fille de
Sylvira l'empoisonneuse.

Du moment où tu m'abandonnes, c'est pour toujours,
je le sais, je le sens ... Aussi, je veux te parler
à coeur ouvert et te prévenir que je te réserve une
vengeance qui sera horrible, atroce, sans rivale

¹⁴⁷ De la Houssaye, Octavia, p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ Martineau, Society in America, p. 117.

dans les annales du crime. Je n'ai encore formé aucun plan ... je n'en ai point eu le temps; mais, ce que je sais, c'est que cette vengeance sera en tout digne des démons qui sauront me l'inspirer. Ne crains rien ... je n'empoisonnerai point ta femme ... je ne toucherai pas à un cheveu de sa tête ... Le docteur Verdier est la principale cause de mon abandon ... il est juste que ma vengeance s'étende jusqu'à lui et qu'il ait sa part de tes souffrances. Quant à Angèle Verdier, ses tortures surpasseront les tiennes et il est à supposer qu'elle y succombera avant même que ma vengeance soit accompli.

.....

A partir de ce moment, Octavia la quarteronne ne vit que pour la vengeance!¹⁴⁹

Alfred took her threats lightly and sailed, as planned, for Europe. A son, Léonce, was born in Florence. When they returned home, their son was a year old.

Meanwhile Octavia busied herself with a series of lovers. The latest was a Cuban, don Miguel Castelllos. It was rumored that Octavia was pregnant by him.

Angèle gave birth to a daughter, Félicie. Octavia gave birth to a girl about the same time. She was expected to leave for Cuba with her lover and child.

On the day of departure Octavia was seen on the levee at boatside. A white nurse brought her child to her: " ... le bonheur des quarteronnes était de se faire servir par des blancs."¹⁵⁰ Octavia was seen boarding the ship with her lover

¹⁴⁹ De la Houssaye, Octavia, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

and child. Alfred's relief quickly turned to horror. His infant girl had been kidnapped in spite of the precautions taken. It was unquestionably Octavia's work. Don Miguel had found a doctor so deep in gambling debts that, for a consideration, he had agreed to support the hoax of Octavia's pregnancy and delivery. An indigent Irish woman literally rented her baby to Octavia so that she could carry off her deception. This child was displayed sufficiently to convince people that Octavia had actually become a mother. At the critical moment of departure it was a simple task for a servant to take a bundled baby to Octavia. The action was perfectly normal under the circumstances.

Upon arriving in Havana, Octavia had Félicie baptized Mary and registered as the illegitimate daughter of Miguel Castellós and Octavia Manzino. Alfred's efforts to trace his daughter were fruitless. Angèle died when Léonce was nine years old. Raised by his father, he was a spoiled child of sullen disposition.

Octavia and her lover spent two years in Cuba and then decided to take "Mary" to Europe. Ten years were spent in Paris where the child was systematically corrupted. When she was almost twelve years old, don Miguel died. Octavia returned to New Orleans.

Noisette, Alfred's servant, whom Octavia had bribed to kidnap the infant, was still in Alfred's employ. She easily arranged for an apparently chance meeting of Léonce and "Mary" newly arrived from Paris. "Mary" was a precocious student of her profession; she easily extracted a diamond ring from Léonce on the occasion of her twelfth birthday. The financing of the present was no problem for Leonce:

Ce fut Noisette qui le tira d'embarras en lui parlant d'un vieux Juif qui bien certainement lui avancerait tout l'argent dont il aurait besoin. Léonce alla trouver le vieux coquin, et celui-ci avança cent cinquante piastres à ce bambin de quatorze ans, à un intérêt colossal.¹⁵¹

When the note was due, the usurer approached Alfred, who knew nothing of his son's involvement. Alfred took cognizance of a bad situation and sent Léonce to Europe for four years. Leonce wrote passionate letters to "Mary" for which he received letters copied from La Nouvelle Héloïse.¹⁵²

When she was fifteen, "Mary" was sold to a one-eyed, octogenarian millionaire. About one year later, Léonce now a young man of eighteen, returned and resumed his courtship of "Mary." They were soon noticed. "Mary's" name was strange by quadroon standards: " ... l'on se demandait quel avait

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 54.

été son caprice et pourquoi elle [Octavia] ne l'avait plutôt nommée Justinia, Melpoména ou la Esméralda."¹⁵³ (The reference to Esméralda is probably a typical anachronism. Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris appeared in 1831, and these stories purport to be a study of the moeurs from 1800 to 1830.)

Léonce entertained serious thoughts of marrying "Mary," but he knew that no satisfactory legal marriage would be possible: " ... il savait que la loi défendait toute alliance avec les gens de couleur et que l'Eglise elle-même tolérerait difficilement ces mariages."¹⁵⁴ Octavia, of a more practical bent, had a solution. She would sell "Mary" for \$10,000 cash: "J'ai horreur du crédit et j'ai pris pour devise le mot anglais: Cash."¹⁵⁵

An opportunity for Léonce to raise the money quickly presented itself. His elderly grandfather gave him a signed check which he was to complete and cash. Instead of \$100.00, Léonce wrote \$10,000. He delivered that sum to Octavia, who arranged a meeting with "Mary." Knowing that her revenge was in the process of execution, she made plans to sail for Europe with her latest lover.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 59.

First, Octavia sent a note to Dr. Verdier saying that his grandson had robbed him. Then, at the last possible moment before sailing, she sent Alfred D- the clothes Félicie was wearing when kidnapped. To these was attached a letter detailing the kidnapping and her revenge now being accomplished:

... laissez-moi bien vous dire comment j'ai élevé votre fille: j'en ai fait la courtisane la plus vile de la Nouvelle Orléans. Je l'ai vendue à tous ceux qui pouvaient me la payer. A seize ans, elle a eu, pour le moins, vingt-cinq amants et j'ai réussi à éteindre dans son âme tout instinct d'honneur et de pudeur.

.
J'ai attiré votre fils chez moi: j'ai tout employé pour allumer dans son coeur, une passion incestueuse pour cette soeur qu'il n'avait jamais connue. Et j'ai réussi au-delà de mes désirs.

.
... un dernier conseil: rendez-vous, vers dix heures, au numéro 136 de la rue St. Louis; la porte du corridor ne sera point fermée à clef, poussez-la seulement ... montez l'escalier et entrez dans la première chambre à droite: là, vous retrouverez votre fille dans les bras de son frère.¹⁵⁶

Alfred put down the letter, picked up a pistol, and ran toward the St. Louis street address. He found the children just as Octavia said they would be. Léonce fled as his father burst in. The sound of two shots brought him back. "Mary" was at that moment expiring, and Alfred was soon to follow:

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

C'est ma fille! ... C'est Félicie ... C'est ta soeur, Léonce ... je l'ai tuée pour arrêter sa vie scandaleuse.

Il n'ajouta pas qu'il s'était tué pour échapper au déshonneur.¹⁵⁷

This murder to save a woman's honor reminds the reader of the elder Dumas' Antony, a play to which our author alluded on many occasions.

Léonce's health and even his reason were affected by the tragedy. His mental faculties never returned, and he entered a nursing home where he remained the rest of his life. The author claimed that Octavia's letter was copied from the newspaper. The récit concludes with a fervent prayer for Octavia's eternal damnation:

Mais espérons que la vengeance divine a dû s'appesantir sur la tête de cette créature qui, pour se venger d'un simple abandon auquel elle devait s'attendre, sut préparer une vengeance aussi infernale et l'accomplir avec autant de calcul et de persévérance. Ah! je le répète, espérons que la justice de Dieu aussi bien que le mépris des hommes s'attachera à jamais au pas d'Octavia la quarteronne.¹⁵⁸

No other quadroon will commit so heinous a crime or merit such a sanguinary curse.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 67.

Violetta¹⁵⁹ was composed immediately after Octavia.

It shows a more sympathetic character in that the heroine finishes her life as a dévote--not unlike Cable's Madame Delphine. Our author first called this heroine Victoria, but changed her mind, lined out Victoria, and wrote Violetta. This was in an allusion to her in the Octavia manuscript.¹⁶⁰

Violetta contains more references to actual persons than any of the other quadron stories. One can identify a lawyer, a doctor, a priest, and several prominent family names, although in the last case no one bearing the given names can be identified. Madame de la Houssaye has many references to her own family. Her genealogical information consists of a few facts and much fabrication. Her insistence on calling certain fabrications "faits historiques" disqualifies her from any serious consideration in the field of roman de mœurs.

The year is 1820 and the scene is a large home ("les Magnolias") in the faubourg Marigny.¹⁶¹ Pierre Saulvé, a rich

¹⁵⁹ Louise Raymond, Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Deuxième Partie: Violetta la Quarteronne (Bonnet Carré, La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1895), MS, loc. cit., Volume VII, pp. 1-184.

¹⁶⁰ De la Houssaye, Octavia, MS, loc. cit., p. 212.

¹⁶¹ The faubourg Marigny was to the east of the Vieux

Royal St. merchant, inhabits "les Magnolias" with his wife and five children, the eldest of whom is Marie, aged twelve.¹⁶²

His wife, Hermine, was a former seamstress. Like the author's grandmother she knew of the quadroons only through accounts in the newspapers:

Elle en ignorait absolument les mystères et les cancons; et si quelquefois, en parcourant une des gazettes de l'époque, elle suivait de l'oeil le récit des extravagances de ces belles quarteronnes dont on s'occupait un peu trop en ce temps, c'était avec dégoût que la pure jeune femme jetait de côté ce papier qui osait parler sans honte de la beauté et du libertinage de ces infâmes créatures, qui savaient attirer sur leur existence et leurs actions l'attention du public et de la presse.¹⁶³

Pierre Saulvé knew little more than his wife about the quadroons. He accepted the invitation of a client to attend one of the balls. Like Charles Rennes in Octavia he did not foresee the consequences of his action:

Oh! si en cet instant Pierre Saulvé avait pu deviner les suites de sa fatale complaisance, comme il se serait reculé avec horreur! comme il aurait

Carré and slightly downstream. In the present day the area from Elysian Fields Avenue and the river eastward to the Industrial Canal would be the approximate location of this faubourg.

¹⁶²There was a prominent sugar planter above New Orleans named Pierre Sauvé (different spelling). The levee on his plantation broke causing the partial inundation of New Orleans in May, 1849. "Sauvé's Crevasse" was never forgotten.

¹⁶³De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 1.

couru se cacher sous l'aile de l'ange qui, depuis quinze années, veillait sur son bonheur. Mais, hélas! l'avenir nous est fermé et un moment d'imprudence entraîne souvent avec lui les suites les plus funestes.¹⁶⁴

Despite his forty-two years, Pierre was dazzled at this ball, his first:

Il avait beaucoup lu au sujet de ces quarteronnes dans les journaux. Il avait entendu vanter leur beauté magique, l'élégance et le luxe de leurs toilettes, leur grâce sans pareille et surtout leur parler si doux qu'on eût dit une musique.¹⁶⁵

He noted Alfred D- and Octavia (Octavia), Percy Castel and Gina (to figure in Gina), and Valéry Ahston and Dahlia (to figure in Dahlia). He was not, however, prepared for the entrance of Violetta. He responded à la Charles Rennes in Octavia:

Oh! non! non! se dit-il, ce ne peut être une créature humaine qui soit aussi belle! ... C'est sans doute un sylphe, une nymphe, peut-être une déesse échappée de l'Olympe.

Il n'osait dire un ange.

Il est impossible de décrire le visage de cette ondine, de cette petite fée que Pierre regarde avec une admiration qui touche à l'extase. Certes, en l'examinant, personne ne se douterait qu'une seule goutte de sang noir coule dans ses veines.¹⁶⁶

The use of "il est impossible de décrire" and the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

allusion to Violetta's lack of Negroid features strongly recall the description of Octavia.

From his initial awe Pierre's emotions gravitated to the baser passions:

Il est fou, il oublie tout. Il ne voit que Violetta au milieu de cette foule; la seule musique qu'il écoute avec ravissement est celle de son rire charmant. Il se sent pris d'une sorte de frénésie, du désir d'emporter dans ses bras cette adorable créature, de la dévorer de baisers et même de morsures! ... Il ne se connaît plus lui-même, il se sent subjugué, aveuglé, attiré par cette enfant qui, comme le serpent magnétise le pauvre oiseau affolé, magnétise cet homme dont le regard la dévore.¹⁶⁷

Violetta was a diminutive girl less than seventeen years old. Friends called her "la Miette." Her temper compensated for any lack of physical stature; and she quickly demonstrated it to Pierre, who, in his neophyte's innocence, offered her refreshments at the public bar. Her scornful rejection of the offer temporarily demoralized him. Bystanders told him that this was not Violetta's level. Humiliated, but wiser, he offered her dinner in a private room. This was the "petit souper" arrangement Madame de la Houssaye described with so much relish:

Les viandes les plus succulentes, les gibiers les plus fins, du poisson, des huitres, des galantines, des salades étaient servis dans la porcelaine la plus riche et chaque plat reposait sur un réchaud d'argent, tandis que des fleurs rares, des fruits, des gâteaux,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

des bonbons scintillaient dans des corbeilles de cristal et de filigrane. Des gobelets de formes différentes entouraient chaque couvert et, sur une petite table, à portée de la main de Pierre, on voyait une douzaine de bouteilles aux goulots de formes et de couleurs différentes.¹⁶⁸

Elsewhere these suppers were called veritable "noces de Gamache" and "souters à la Régence." Pierre was unprepared, and he became an easy victim. The following day he went to Violetta's home, but found the door barred by an old aunt.

Miette li couchée ... li malade ... vous pas capable oir li avant asoir. Vous bouré li tant hier au soir que li manqué crever pendant la nuitte. Li té gonflée comme in crapaud.¹⁶⁹ [Standard French translation: Miette est couchée ... elle est malade ... vous ne pouvez pas la voir avant ce soir. Vous l'avez tant bourrée hier soir qu'elle a manqué de crever pendant la nuit. Elle était gonflée comme un crapaud.]

The manuscript was Annotated, "Traduire ceci en mauvais anglais."¹⁷⁰ One wonders what the English translation of this passage might have been.

We are given a bit of local color when Percy Castel, Gina's lover, dances the bamboula with Violetta.

La bamboula est bien certainement la danse la plus voluptueuse et la plus indécente qui soit connue.

.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ De la Houssaye, Violetta MS, loc. cit., p. 29.

Les danseurs commencent doucement par une sorte de balancement ou plutôt de tressaillement de tout leurs corps; peu à peu ils s'animent, se poursuivent, s'atteignent, se saisissent, s'éloignent encore l'un de l'autre: enfin le cavalier atteint sa danseuse et l'enveloppe d'une dernière étreinte, et alors elle se laisse tomber dans ses bras haletante, frémissante, vaincue ... Et tout cela se fait avec une grâce, une passion, une volupté qui font tressaillir le plus calme. Chaque mouvement du danseur exprime le désir, un désir modéré aux premières passes, mais qui s'accroît de minute en minute et qui finit par atteindre le délire de la passion sans bornes et sans honte, lorsque la danseuse se débat dans ses bras dans une sorte de convulsion qui fait monter la rougeur au front des moins timides.¹⁷¹

It is probable that Cable's article, "The Dance in Place Congo," which appeared in the February, 1886 Century Magazine, influenced Mme de la Houssaye to give this description of the bamboula--a description incidentally, far more graphic than Cable's. Madame de la Houssaye mentioned working on two quadron récits in August, 1885. On September 12, 1885, she said that she had just finished Octavia. There is no internal evidence in Violetta or any marginalia in the manuscript to indicate the date of composition. It follows Octavia, known to date from 1885, and precedes Gina, which is dated 1886 and 1887 in the manuscript. There is a reference to "un enfant de nos jours (1886)."¹⁷² Volume IX of the

¹⁷¹De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 41.

¹⁷²De la Houssaye, Gina, MS, loc. cit., Vol. VIII, p. 58.

de la Houssaye collection bears this note, "Continuation de Gina la quarteronne, ce 24 avril 1887."¹⁷³ Violetta, we may assume, dates from 1886 and could have been influenced by a February, 1886 article. The author, herself, in an aside to the reader suggested another possible source. She said an old friend recalled the dances, soupers, etc. He also had newspapers dating from 1792 to 1860.¹⁷⁴

Soon after that evening of the bamboula, Violetta was officially placée. She yielded to no one in her profession:

Mais, disons bien, une fois pour toutes, que la Marguerite de la Tour de Nesle, Lucrece Borgia et même Messaline auraient pu recevoir des leçons de dévergondage de luxure et du libertinage le plus vil, le plus grossier de cette petite quarteronne de dix-huit ans.¹⁷⁵

Naturally, this new burden made itself felt on Pierre. He pretended to need more money for his business. Little economies were demanded of his wife; children's birthday presents were omitted for the first time.

Madame Saulvé was surprised when the wife of a jeweler asked if she might see the diamonds Pierre had bought for her.

¹⁷³Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴The first local newspaper, Le Moniteur de la Louisiane, started in 1794.

¹⁷⁵De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 54.

Hermine Saulvé had never received any gifts of that magnitude from Pierre; Violetta had. Questioned about the diamonds, Pierre lied and said that he had bought them for an out-of-town client who had paid him cash for the transaction.

Violetta made frequent visits to Pierre's place of business and always noisily demanded immediate attention. Simons, a clerk, finally yielded to a normal impulse and returned her insults. Pierre Saulvé fired him on the spot. George Ormsby, a young man of twenty-two from the Attakapas country, replaced Simons. Simons wrote an anonymous letter to Madame Saulvé, telling her of her husband's liaison and his plan to mortgage their home to buy Violetta a house on the Gulf coast.

Confronted with these facts, Pierre was still adamant. He would mortgage their home, he insisted. She said she would not sign the necessary papers:

--C'est ce que nous verrons! s'écria-t-il en s'élançant vers elle et en lui saisissant le poignet. J'ai promis que vous signeriez cet acte et, par Satan, vous le signerez.--Vous me faites mal, dit-elle en cherchant à se dégager.--Alors, signez!¹⁷⁶

Pierre threatened to abandon her and the children if she did not sign the papers. She said she would support the

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 69.

children with her sewing. He was beyond reason at this point and burst from the room, ignoring his three-year-old child who was clinging to him:

Oubliant que c'était un enfant, le sien qui s'accrochait à lui, Pierre repoussa la pauvre petite avec tant de force qu'elle alla tomber, sans connaissance, à l'autre bout de la galerie, le visage inondé de sang.¹⁷⁷

The enraged father did not even notice what he had done as he continued out into the yard. Not too long after this dramatic scene, thirteen-year-old Henri became seriously ill. He was put under Dr. Fortin's care;¹⁷⁸ Pierre had not returned home since the mortgage scene.

Marie Saulvé, realizing the serious nature of her younger brother's illness, decided to bring her father home. She instructed the coachman to drive her to Violetta's residence. She entered as a "souper" was in progress:

Mais en cet instant, ce n'étaient plus des hommes, c'étaient des êtres abrutis par la débauche, ivres de vin, et laissant échapper de leurs lèvres les chants les plus obscènes et des rires qui faisaient frissonner l'innocente enfant que, seul l'amour fraternel avait conduite dans cet antre fangeux.

Et les femmes? Ah! les regards de Marie s'en détournèrent avec horreur! ces viles créatures, à demi nues, ivres de vin et de volupté comme ceux aux caresses

¹⁷⁷ De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 70.

¹⁷⁸ Newspapers of the period have references to a Dr. Fortin and to a Fortin, "officier de santé."

desquels elles se livraient sans rougir. Oh! non! elles ne pouvaient appartenir au même sexe qu'elle. Et là, juste en face de la porte qu'elle venait d'ouvrir, la jeune fille apercevait son père, tenant sur ses genoux Violetta la quarteronne.¹⁷⁹

Marie's presence in such surroundings aroused the crowd. All save Violetta told Pierre to go home. A friend of the author restrained Violetta as Pierre followed Marie home. The friend recalled that the quadron bit and scratched him. It was he who furnished much of the material for these stories, according to Mme de la Houssaye.¹⁸⁰

As do all of Madame de la Houssaye's characters, Pierre promises to honor the last requests of a dying person:

--Papa, dit-il, tu sais qu'on ne refuse rien à ceux qui vont mourir, et j'ai une grâce à te demander ...

--Promets-moi ...

--Tout, tout ce que tu voudras, mon fils chéri! s'écria le malheureux père.

.

Oh! papa! cher papa! promets-moi que pauvre maman ne sera plus obligée de coudre [pour gagner sa vie].¹⁸¹

We learn that there is almost no food in the home and that Pierre's clerks, under his orders, had refused credit to Madame Saulvé when she tried to buy material for winter clothing. Marie gave music lessons to supplement their income.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 82.

Pierre responded to the nobility of his family:

Hermine, dit Pierre, en la serrant sur sa poitrine, en face de ce lit où notre enfant se meurt, je jure de te consacrer ma vie et d'être encore pour toi et mes enfants ce que j'étais autrefois.¹⁸²

The boy's condition worsened and he spoke incoherently-- even alluding to our author's "Chattanooga." Finally at the height of his delirium, he sat up in the manner of Emma Bovary who thought she was seeing the blind man again:

Mais tout à coup, on le vit se soulever à demi sur son lit ... ses yeux se dilatèrent comme en présence d'une vision effrayante. Il jeta un cri d'épouvante et dit en se débattant entre les bras de son père: --Chassez-la, cette sorcière ... chassez Violetta la quarteronne.¹⁸³

The boy died and the family was reunited. Marie, who had planned to marry George Ormsby, postponed her wedding one year. Violetta bided her time: "Elle eut donc l'air de céder, mais résolut de ne point s'ennuyer; et plus que jamais, sut métamorphoser le boudoir vert en véritable Tour de Nesle."¹⁸⁴

At this point of relative stability, the author began a digressionary episode:

Et maintenant, pour mettre sous les yeux du lecteur un des incidents les plus tristes et les plus

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 87.

romantiques de ce récit, je vais feuilleter les registres de ma grand'mère et mettre sous les yeux du lecteur les quelques lignes que je vais en extraire.¹⁸⁵

The grandmother said that her father, Pierre Bossier, was the father of nine children. On the adjoining plantation in St. John the Baptist Parish, lived M. Alphonse Perret and his seven children. This is the same Pierre Bossier who, we are told, lived in St. James Parish.¹⁸⁶ Four of the Perret boys married four of her sisters, the grandmother related. (This is factual.) She did not mention the two Bossier boys, Pierre fils and Georges, whose names figure in many documents in St. John the Baptist Parish Civil records; she did mention an Eveline and a Marie Bossier, whose names do not figure in the records. According to the grandmother's imaginary account, Eveline Bossier married a Louis Barré, and Marie Bossier a Georges Haydel.¹⁸⁷ The manuscript of Violetta proves that Madame de la Houssaye was creating genealogy. Eveline was said to be married to Louis Barré. Louis was lined through and Georges written over it. In the finished (printed) version it was again Louis Barré. In the manuscript Marie was

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁸⁶Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana, p. 34.

¹⁸⁷De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 87.

first shown as married to Etienne Verret. His name was lined through and Louis Landry substituted. In the printed version she married Georges Haydel.¹⁸⁸

The grandmother said that at eighteen she married Daniel Pain who had lost his parents. According to the chronology given in Strange True Stories of Louisiana, the grandmother would have been eighteen in 1797. The fact is that she married François Daniel Pain in 1785. Daniel Pain was the father of the groom and very much alive at the time of the wedding as he died in 1789.¹⁸⁹ She further stated that Noël Perret married Rosélie Pain. He actually married Françoise Elénore Pain.

Marianne Perret, daughter of Alphonse Perret, figures prominently in the story: "Sans être ce qu'on peut appeler jolie, Marianne était une des plus charmantes créatures que je connaisse."¹⁹⁰ We are told that she did not marry early-- possibly a result of not being pretty. What are the facts? There is a document dated October 8, 1794¹⁹¹ and called "Accord

¹⁸⁸De la Houssaye, Violetta, MS, loc. cit., Vol. VII, p. 118.

¹⁸⁹All of these facts were alluded to in preceding chapters. They are easily verifiable in the St. John the Baptist Parish Courthouse at Edgard, La.

¹⁹⁰De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 87.

¹⁹¹Court Record, St. John the Baptist Parish.

entre les Sieurs + Dame Perret et leur mère Mme Veuve Masson."

(Marie Anne Pujol married (1) Alphonse Perret and (2) a M. Masson.) In this agreement accord the children are listed and Marianne is the only one listed as having a spouse. Not only did she have a spouse she had been widowed and remarried! She was referred to as Marianne St. Martin, wife of Pierre Bauchet St. Martin, her second husband. Her first husband had been Louis Pain, brother-in-law of our author's grandmother.¹⁹²

There is also recorded in the year 1794 the gift of a mestisse [sic] by Jeanne Rougeau, Veuve Pain, to her grandchild Louise Pain. (Jeanne Rougeau was the wife of Daniel Pain and the mother of Louis, Augustin, Françoise, and François Daniel Pain who married our author's grandmother.) Jeanne Rougeau, Veuve Pain, gave the métisse in the presence of Marianne Perret St. Martin.¹⁹³ There is no doubt that Louis Pain was dead at least before 1794.

What follows is patently a product of the fiction writer's imagination.

Louis Pain was eighteen when the author's grandmother married his brother. Louis and his sister moved in with the

¹⁹² Arthur, op. cit., p. 385.

¹⁹³ Court Record, St. John the Baptist Parish.

young couple, as the elder brother was acting as a guardian. It was with dismay that the grandmother saw Louis Pain court and marry Marianne Perret. We might add that the writer was not sure which name she would give to this mythical husband of Marianne. In the Octavia manuscript she called him Laurence Pain.¹⁹⁴ Under any name he was a typical libertin:

Ah! c'est que je connaissais si bien mon jeune beau-frère! Non seulement, il aimait les plaisirs à la folie et s'y jetait à corps perdu, mais il était libertin dans l'âme et ne reculait jamais devant les avances d'une femme, quelle que fût cette femme! Combien d'anecdotes scandaleuses dont il était le héros nous avaient été rapportées! et, tout jeune que fut Louis, son frère avait été obligé de payer d'assez fortes sommes pour apaiser des parents dont il avait outragé les filles.¹⁹⁵

Violetta made the acquaintance of this man shortly after the death of Pierre Saulvé's son and during the period when his resolution to remain faithful was strongest. Louis Pain was but a diversion for her as she bided her time. Approached in his store, Pierre Saulvé yielded to Violetta's charms and abandoned his family again. His new-found joy was short-lived. Violetta contracted typhoid fever. In her delirium she spoke of Louis Pain, Percy Castel, her sometime dancing partner, and others. Pierre swore that he would get

¹⁹⁴De la Houssaye, Octavia, MS, loc. cit., p. 41.

¹⁹⁵De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 88.

revenge for her infidelity.

Violetta's health returned, but she suffered one of the common discomforts of typhoid fever--baldness. No wig would match her hair. By a strange coincidence, Louis' wife had the same shade of hair. Violetta demanded her hair and Louis acquiesced. His wife yielded to this caprice to try to win him back. Our author has a footnote to accompany the cutting of Marianne's hair: "Ce fait est historique."¹⁹⁶

Pierre Saulvé's jealousy continued to grow. He had Violetta watched until he had an opportunity to catch her in a compromising position, and then he burst into her house while she was entertaining Louis Pain on the second floor. At the sound of Pierre's approach, Louis slipped out to the balcony. Knowing that his presence would compromise Violetta and possibly cause her death, he jumped to the street some sixteen or eighteen feet below. He was found by a police patrol and taken to a hospital. He died begging the forgiveness of his wife. Of Pain's jump and death our author said: "Ce fait est historique."¹⁹⁷ The appearance in an 1820 scene of a character who died before 1794 is a typical anachronism of this series.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 96, N.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 98, N.

The death of Louis Pain added to Pierre's disenchantment with Violetta. The latter was not concerned; she had marked Pierre's new clerk George Ormsby for her next victim.

Simons, the clerk fired by Pierre for insulting Violetta, had his revenge. Pierre attempted to take Violetta to a ball on his daughter's invitation. Simons, acting on the reception committee, ostentatiously called attention to the fact that quadroons were not admitted. Pierre and Violetta had to withdraw amid the jeers of the onlookers.

En passant the author alludes to La Dame Blanche at the opera. This is another anachronism, as Boieldieu's work was not performed until 1825.

Pierre, mindful of the tragedy of Louis Pain, decided to take less drastic steps with Violetta's new lover. He intended to cut off her income and prevent Georges Ormsby from marrying his daughter. His simple plan was thwarted by a scene not unlike the Pain episode. Pierre found Georges hiding in a closet in Violetta's room, a discovery quickly ending in insults and fisticuffs, with Georges, the lower, stalking angrily away. Pierre gave Violetta a parting gift of 20,000 piastres which were in the Citizen's Bank.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸Non-existent. A City Bank was opened in 1831. Vide Fossier, op. cit., p. 69.

The humiliated Georges Ormsby sought satisfaction. He chose Lucien Forstall and Vincent Ducros for his seconds.¹⁹⁹ Pierre chose Alcée Longer, his attorney, and Charles Daunois for his seconds.²⁰⁰ They met at dawn at Bayou St. John--presumably near what is now called the "Dueling Oaks." Pierre purposely wasted his shot, but Georges shot to kill. Pierre fell mortally wounded after the exchange. The Abbé Mony was called to administer the last rites.²⁰¹

To avoid lynching, Violetta embarked for Havana. She returned two years later with a Cuban lover. Marie Saulvé entered service with a religious order three years after her father's death. We are brought up to date, or at least to a date that the author chose for her purposes:

Nous sommes maintenant en 1870,²⁰² acheva l'ami
qui m'avait aidée à trouver les faits relatifs à

¹⁹⁹Both of these surnames were well known at the period, although no one with the given names of these characters can be identified.

²⁰⁰Alcée Longer can not be identified. There was a Lt. Colonel Charles E. Daunoy (different spelling) in the Louisiana militia in the 1830's. Vide Fossier, op. cit., p. 200.

²⁰¹One notes references to an Abbé Moni (different spelling) in the newspapers of that period.

²⁰²The MS, loc. cit., Vol. VII, p. 181 has 1850 lined through and 1870 written above it. In the introduction she said she found the papers in 1878.

l'histoire de Violetta la quarteronne: comme vous, chère madame, je suis né en 1820 et lorsque j'ai connu Violetta la quarteronne, elle était déjà une vieille femme; elle a aujourd'hui soixante-sept ans.²⁰³

In her old age Violetta, like Cable's Madame Delphine, became religious: "Comme toutes les vieilles quarteronnes qui ont été de fameuses coquines dans leur jeune temps, Violetta est devenue dévote."²⁰⁴ Georges Ormsby returned to his home town where he eventually married. His thoughts were haunted by an antithesis à la Victor Hugo:

Aujourd'hui Georges Ormsby est riche, heureux en apparence et entouré d'une grande famille d'enfants et de petits enfants. Mais il a bien certainement gardé au fond de son coeur le souvenir des deux femmes, l'ange et le démon, qui ont eu sur sa vie une si grande influence. Jamais il ne prononce leurs noms; ses enfants ne les ont jamais entendus! mais lui! Ah! comme il se souvient des traits si doux de Marie Saulvé! comme il bénit son souvenir et les courts moments de bonheur qu'elle lui a donnés! Mais à côté de ce visage si pur s'élève celui d'une autre femme ... d'une femme dont le souvenir lui inspire une véritable horreur, celui de Violetta la quarteronne.²⁰⁵

There is a dedication on the last page to Lucien Montégut of St. John the Baptist Parish. He married a daughter of James Freret, her New Orleans friend and attorney.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ De la Houssaye, Violetta, p. 129.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁰⁶ Arthur, op. cit., p. 38.

Violetta, unlike Octavia, was serialized in Le Meschacébé at Bonnet Carré (Reserve), La. The file of this paper is far from complete. We do know, however, that Chapter VI of Violetta was running on September 22, 1894. It was followed in Le Meschacébé by Gina which began on February 2, 1895.

CHAPTER IV

LES QUARTERONNES DE LA NOUVELLE ORLEANS:

GINA AND DAHLIA

Gina and Dahlia, as has been noted, were serialized in Le Meschacébé and actually printed as novels, although the printed pages were never bound. Charles Lasseigne, the printer, held the copyrights of these two books, as he held the rights of all the series except Octavia, published in 1894, the year of Madame de la Houssaye's death.

Neither the serialized version nor the unbound printed version is complete. Gina runs 551 pages in the incomplete printed version. This corresponds to 579 pages of the manuscript found in Volumes VII, VIII and IX of the de la Houssaye Collection. The manuscript has a large error in pagination. It goes from 1 to 489 and then back to 452. Thus, the manuscript, which ends at page 617, really represents 655 pages--pages 452 to 489 being used twice. On the basis of 551 printed pages being equivalent to 579 manuscript pages, we may assume that the completed printed version would have been some 625 pages.

Dahlia is found in Volumes IX and X of the de la Houssaye Collection. In the printed version 295 double column pages correspond to 512 pages of manuscript. There is a pagination error in this manuscript as well. The pages run from 1 to 535 and then back to 436. Thus the manuscript, which ends on page 508, really represents 608 pages--pages 436 to 508 being used twice. The 608 pages of manuscript would be equivalent to about 360 of the double column pages.

Since only the manuscript version of these two novels is complete, all references will be to this version, unless otherwise stated.

Gina

Gina represents a departure from the simple plots and small number of characters in Octavia and Violetta. The sheer bulk of the work strikes us at first. It is almost eight times as long as Octavia or three and one half times as long as Violetta. Characters and incidents are multiplied to the point of confusion. Although the main action takes place in the decade 1820-1830, we are introduced, summarily, of course, to no less than four generations. There are references to the last quarter of the eighteenth century in England and to the post-Civil War period in the United States.

More interesting than this plethora of characters and

incidents are the author's observations on race and the psychology of the quadroons in general. In this work and in Dahlia we find more depth and realism in the characters than in Octavia and Violetta. They are no longer the pure ange or démon types. We find an effort to probe the motivations and the aspirations of the quadroons. The dialogue is more vigorous and life-like than in the first two novels of the series.

Gina was updated by the printer-publisher. Not only did he change allusions to apply to his own time, e.g., 1886 became 1895, but he also placed the action in 1828 and not in 1820 as the manuscript has it.

Part One of Gina, called "Jeannette et Gothe," begins, like Violetta, with the description of a house. "Les Mûriers" was situated in the heart of New Orleans on St. Louis Street between Royal and Chartres Streets. There was much activity; the house was being made ready for occupancy after a long period of vacancy. We are told that the widow of an Englishman owns it. Madame Percy, later to become Madame Renaud, had only one daughter, Léontine, an extravagant child before her father's sudden death. She quickly changed when a new way of life became imperative. Many economies were suggested--among them, the hiring out of their slaves. Angélique, Léontine's nourrice, had three daughters. Matte, the eldest, was two

months older than Léontine. The second daughter, Jeannette, was seven years younger and dark--probably of a Spanish or an Italian father. In her teens she will become Adoréah. Gothe is one year younger than Jeannette-Adoréah. Her blond appearance suggested a German father. She will assume the name Althéa. These two younger girls were given the opportunities of white children, although their mother knew no good would come of it.

A friend of Dr. Renaud's daughter enters the picture. This girl had married a Canadian millionaire, Edouard Castel, whose family was plagued by hereditary consumption. He died leaving four children after ten years of marriage. Of Edouard Castel's children, only Alice, the youngest girl, and a son, Hamilton, survived their eighteenth birthday. Their mother, a native of Louisiana, thought that the climate of her own state would prove salutary. Alice was already showing signs of the dreaded disease when the family moved. Hamilton, however, did not leave Canada with his family.

Léontine Percy was forming a romantic image of Hamilton Castel:

Il doit avoir une brillante éducation ... avec une fortune comme la sienne aucun avantage n'a dû lui être refusé ... C'est un artiste, un peintre à ce qu'écrit sa mère ... j'adore les artistes. Mais si après tout j'allais m'amuser à aimer ce jeune homme!¹

¹De la Houssaye, Gina, MS, loc. cit., Vol. VII, p. 28.

Hamilton's wealth had given him all advantages in our author's eyes. The role of money seems to grow in inverse proportion to Madame de la Houssaye's own fortunes. In Dahlia the preoccupation with money becomes almost obsessive.

Pa Jean, the old Negro gardener, is heard one day singing a refreshingly natural song about the wind and the water. This song is admittedly an interpolation as are the songs in Pouponne et Balthazar. The author wrote Cable of her discovery of it in 1885: "J'ai pensé à vous hier en entendant un vieux nègre chanter la plus drôle de chanson imaginable, "Le Combat du vent et de l'eau." Les gestes surtout étaient fort amusants."² The song is not in the text itself, but in a group of songs placed in the manuscript before the story.³ In the printed version of the story we are told that the song will be put at the end of the story. The last pages of this version are missing, as is the last installment of the serialized version. The song was called "In grand bataille" ("Une grande bataille") and not the more proper "Combat du vent et de l'eau" as in the letter to Cable. We will reserve the song for a later chapter on style in which the author's use of dialect is discussed.

²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

³De la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., pp. 201-04.

Alice Castel, recently arrived from Canada and unfamiliar with local customs, mistook Jeannette and Gothe for Léontine's sisters. She was quickly informed of their peculiar status. Alice had read of the quadroons, but had not seen any until meeting these girls. Léontine's remarks to Alice show that she at least was cognizant of their problems:

Je les [les quarteronnes] méprise comme vous, dit Léontine, mais en même temps je les plains. Tenez, prenons ces deux enfants par exemple: elles sont belles d'une beauté exceptionnelle, sans parler de l'éducation qu'elles reçoivent près de moi. Elles ont tout l'instinct du beau: elles aiment la parure, tout ce qui peut charmer les yeux. Avec ces goûts, elles arrivent à l'âge de dix-huit ans: qui épouseront-elles pour les guider dans le sentier des honnêtes femmes? La loi leur défend d'épouser un blanc, et leur goût délicat les éloigne des hommes de leur couleur qui sont généralement des brutes sans éducation et plus ou moins ivrognes. Voyez pour vous-même la conclusion de mes remarques, chère Alice.

--Ainsi c'est là le sort que vous réservez à vos protégées. C'est pour en venir là que vous avez inspiré le goût du luxe? que vous leur avez donné de l'éducation?

--Ah! pour qui donc me prenez-vous? s'écria Léontine dont les yeux s'emplirent de larmes; en faisant ce que j'ai fait j'ai aussi inspiré une profonde piété à ces deux petites.⁴

Pa Jean, who heard the conversation from the garden, merely whistled.

The words used by Léontine echo the travelers' stories e.g., the remarks on education and intermarriage. The statement

⁴De la Houssaye, Gina, MS, loc. cit., p. 46.

about the quadroons' feeling toward men of their own color sounds strangely like the author of Society in America:

"They [the quadroom men] marry women of a somewhat darker color than their own; the women of their own color objecting to them, 'ils sont si dégoûtants' [sic]!"⁵

Shortly after this conversation, Jeannette and Gothe came in to entertain Alice with a duo from Zémire et Azor currently à la mode. Our author originally set the action of this novel in 1820. Research confirms the fact that Grétry's opera was performed in that year.⁶ The reference to an obscure contemporary performance is proof to this writer that the novelist had at least a few newspapers from the period she was trying to reconstruct.

Pa Jean, who often acted as an illiterate raisonneur, was not impressed with the girls' singing. He also mocked Gothe's shunning of her own people and recalled that her own grandmother was quite dark: " ... li té noire comme in caran-cro." [She was black as a buzzard.]⁷

Alice Castel, whose health was deteriorating, was

⁵Martineau, Society in America, p. 117.

⁶Le Courrier (New Orleans), January 12, 1820.

⁷De la Houssaye, Gina, MS, loc. cit., p. 51.

impatiently awaiting her brother Hamilton's arrival from Canada. Hers was not the only problem. Matte, Angèle's oldest daughter, was in love with Giulio Lorenzo, a Sicilian, who, predictably enough, had a fruit stand. There were the usual obstacles to intermarriage, but they were obstacles that Hamilton's wealth could remove, as will be seen later.

Hamilton finally arrived after effecting the jailbreak of a friend of his sister, Marc Stanhald, who had killed Pietro Henriquez, his sister's Cuban husband, when he found him abusing his wife and child. The escape took place at midnight on a stormy night. There were waiting horses, a bribed jailer, flashes of lightning, and almost all the trappings which a romantic imagination could devise.

Alice's brother was no less surprised than she to learn that Jeannette and Gothe were quadroons. They impressed him favorably. He went to see Père Antoine to expedite the marriage of their sister. Again we note the power of money:

J'ai vu le père Antoine et il m'a dit que le mariage religieux était permis entre personnes de races et de couleurs différentes. Mais, il y a à ces mariages plusieurs conditions. D'abord, il faut payer à l'église une assez forte dépense; ensuite, il est exigé que les époux soient libres tous les deux.⁸

The necessary dispensations were obtained, and Giulio

⁸Ibid., p. 91.

and Matte were married. They were to become the parents of Gina, the heroine.

Gothe, the youngest of the three quadroon sisters, did not understand her peculiar social position. She asked Léontine to explain why they were different and why people pitied them:

Léontine attira Gothe sur ses genoux et, avec toute la délicatesse possible, essaya de lui faire comprendre la différence qui existait entre les deux races, s'apesantissant sur cette circonstance que les quartenes avaient du sang nègre dans les veines.
--Je savais tout cela, dit Jeannette avec un sourire hautain, et Gothe sait aussi bien que moi que nous devons ces quelques gouttes de sang noir au vieux papa Noé qui a maudit son fils Cham et en a fait un nègre parce que ce fils, ayant assisté à une soulerie de monsieur son père, s'était moqué de lui.

Angélique, who was present, said that Jeannette did not "know her place" and had insulted their butcher Jules' daughter, a criticism that drew a spirited response from Jeannette and increased her sense of racial animosity:

... elle était bien insolente d'oser parler ainsi à une blanche et que, malgré ses belles robes et son piano, elle n'était qu'une mulâtresse, tandis que la fille de Jules était blanche.

--L'idée de me comparer à cette saleté! à cette vanu-pieds! s'était écriée la petite orgueilleuse en furie.

--Cette saleté vaut mieux que toi, avait répondu Angélique, elle est blanche et peut aller partout ... tandis que toi, tu n'es qu'une négresse!

C'était pour Jeannette une insulte sanglante qu'elle ne pardonna jamais à sa mère et qui vint encore augmenter la haine contre les Blancs qui commençait dans son coeur d'enfant.

Oui, continua Léontine en caressant Gothe, il existe un grand préjugé contre les personnes de couleur et les Blancs n'aiment pas à les fréquenter. --C'est donc pour cela, nénaine, dit Gothe, que vous n'invitez jamais les petites filles du voisinage à venir nous voir?

Au lieu de lui répondre, Léontine l'embrassa.⁹

Léontine was also deaf to her questions on the identity of their fathers. She held up Matte as a model for them. Jeannette replied that Olivia, one of the less virtuous quadroons, was more appealing to her. Léontine silenced her.

Alice Castel, realizing that she was dying, asked that Hamilton marry Léontine. Hamilton was in love with Léontine, but fear of his tendency toward tuberculosis had prompted him not to press his suit, but the deathbed wish of his sister was stronger than his judgment, and they married two weeks after his sister's death. The couple then left for Canada to arrange Alice's burial at home. Léontine's mother married Dr. Renaud, and "Les Mûriers" was closed and left in Angèle's care.

One year after their marriage, Hamilton and Léontine had a son, Percy, in Canada. A daughter, Alice, was born the following year. Léontine wanted to return to Louisiana. Plans were made, but the news, on the eve of their departure, that Léontine's mother had died, caused them to change their plans, and they sailed for Europe instead. Hamilton, now

⁹Ibid., pp. 98-99.

twenty-eight years old, was unmistakably succumbing to the family disease. After two years in Europe, a moribund Hamilton returned to Louisiana. As a precautionary measure for his children, he stipulated that they spend fifteen years in the healthier climate of Europe.

Fifteen years passed and Léontine and the children were ready to return home. This was the reason for the activity at "Les Mûriers" in April, 1828 as the novel began.

Part two is called "Gina la quarteronne." The Castel family is renewing old ties and trying to adjust to the changes. Pa Jean is dead and many of the other slaves have new masters. A girl, Gina, was born to Giulio and Matte in 1810. Giulio himself is dead. Jeannette and Gothe ran away and became Adoréah and Althéa. They were sixteen and fifteen at the time. Léontine Castel realized that she had to accept much of the blame for the girls' conduct. She learned in the newspapers that Jeannette-Adoréah had driven Charles Rennes to suicide. (This incident is reported in detail in Octavia.) More recently Jeannette-Adoréah had been kept by the elderly Dr. Fleury for twelve years. Her own son Percy gave her scant consolation. He is described in the same manner as the libertin Louis Pain in Violetta. Gothe claimed to be the wife of Horace Delmond, a gifted Canadian artist. Horace was an orphan whom Hamilton

and Léontine had adopted and educated in Europe.

Gothe's "marriage" to Horace came about in this fashion. Horace loved Gothe and would have married her in Europe, but circumstances precipitated them into a union without benefit of clergy. Gothe was trying to live a virtuous life. Her best friend was the convent-reared Dahlia, heroine of the last novel. At the same time her sister was trying to arrange a placage for her. Gothe was courted by several suitors including an Italian Jew named Ignatio Iniquez. He was persistent to the point of forcibly entering her room. Gothe fled to the only person who could protect her--Horace. She never went back home. Horace was not religious, and, moreover, both knew that a religious ceremony had no legal standing for quadroons. For these reasons no ceremony was held.

Percy Castel often visited Gina who was better protected by Angèle than Gothe had been. They were attracted to each other. Percy's attention was really directed toward acquiring a mistress.

Alice Castel was attracted to Yvon Kernokey, the French-born employee in a Royal Street jewelry store. They fell in love in spite of the disparity of their backgrounds. This couple gave Madame de la Houssaye the opportunity to make a Proustian observation on social mobility:

Disons vite qu'à cette époque reculée, à cette époque de haute aristocratie, les commis (surtout ceux des magasins) n'étaient point admis dans ce qui s'appelait alors la bonne société. Une jeune fille se serait crue déshonorée s'il lui avait fallu danser avec un commis ou avec un économe. Grand Dieu! si ces aristocrates de 1820 pouvaient voir aujourd'hui leurs fils conduire les chars de la ville et leurs filles occupant derrière le comptoir, la place de ces commis si méprisés à cette époque.¹⁰

As time passed, it became apparent that Jeannette-Adoréah was casting aside all vestige of her education and moral training. She made no pretense of respecting Léontine and blamed her for her life and especially for abandoning her to Angélique when Léontine left for Europe. Jeannette's accusations are an indictment of the whites and their role in this unfortunate system. Léontine acted in charity and ignorance, but she could scarcely have obtained more noxious results, had she acted through malice and greed. On a visit Jeannette upbraids her severely:

Vous accusez, vous me reprochez ma conduite qui, après tout, n'est pas plus mauvaise que celle des autres quarteronnes de la ville. Vous grandes dames blanches, vous vous mariez, car vous pouvez choisir un époux parmi vos égaux, nous les quarteronnes, nous nous plaçons, afin de jouir de la vie, s'il y a une différence entre nous, elle m'échappe. Mais vous qui m'accusez, qui me reprochez ce que j'ai fait, n'êtes-vous pas en partie la cause du crime que j'ai commis en me choisissant un riche entreteneur. A peine étions-nous nées, ma soeur et moi, que vous nous emportâtes dans votre chambre: nous étions jolies, intelligentes, c'en était assez pour vous amuser et amuser ceux qui vous visitaient. Ah! je me

¹⁰Ibid., p. 266.

souviens de tout, allez. Vous nous élevâtes comme vos enfants, vous nous fîtes donner de l'éducation; votre bonheur était de nous voir habillées comme les enfants les plus riches de la ville. Vous nous inspirâtes le goût du luxe, celui de la bonne compagnie, tout ce qui était vulgaire était éloigné de nous avec soin ... Et voilà que vous vous mariez ... Vous partez ... et, malgré nos larmes, notre désespoir ... car Dieu sait que nous vous adorions, Nénaine! Vous nous abandonnez aux soins d'une femme sans éducation, à l'esprit borné et pour qui l'argent était tout au monde.

--C'était votre mère, dit Léontine.

--J'admets cela, continua Jeannette en s'animant de plus en plus, mais ce titre de mère lui donnait-il le droit de nous assommer pour la moindre faute? de nous priver de tous plaisirs, de toutes récréations? de nous habiller comme des mendiants? de nous humilier en nous soumettant aux ouvrages les plus vils, les plus grossiers? Dites: pouvez-vous me blâmer de l'avoir abandonnée pour retourner à la vie de luxe et de plaisir à laquelle vous nous avez habituées. Je veux bien convenir que nous l'avons obtenue par des moyens que vous, femmes de monde, avez droit de blâmer. Il en eût été autrement sans doute si vous ne nous aviez point abandonnées. Mais, je le répète, Léontine Castel, notre faute vous sera compté au jour du jugement.¹¹ dernier ... Bien entendu, s'il y a un Dieu dans le ciel.

The scene ended with Jeannette vaguely threatening Léontine. Alice found her mother in a state of shock; she suspected that the visitor was one of the quadroons she had read about. This curiosity prompted Léontine to discontinue the newspapers--a move injurious to herself, as it deprived her of news of the wayward Percy.

An occasion to avenge herself was soon afforded Jeannette. A costume ball was scheduled. Percy arranged to take Gina, but

¹¹Ibid., pp. 287-88.

there remained the problems of costumes. At Jeannette's urging Percy borrowed from a stock Jewish usurer type, Ignatio Igomez. Getting Percy involved with a usurer was the first step of Jeannette's revenge, just as it was Octavia's plan in the work of that name.

The costume ball, itself, seems to have been inspired by Dumas père's Henri III et sa cour for among the guests could be noticed arbalétriers of this period, Catherine de Médicis, Ruggieri, etc. (These allusions to the play, and we must assume that they are to the play, also represent another anachronism. The play dates from 1829; the action of this story is dated 1828.) At the height of the festivities a song and a masked figure startled Jeannette, and we recall at once the unidentified masked figure and the horn in Hernani. The familiar song, "Le Combat du vent et de l'eau," was heard, apparently being sung by Pa Jean. Jeannette fainted. She had bought Pa Jean when Léontine left for Europe. To repay him for his taunts, she had had him flogged to death. It was no apparition. Horance Delmond had played a joke on Jeannette.

Soon after this ball, Angélique died. Gina had to turn to her aunt. Percy became more determined to have Gina, but Jeannette, acting as her guardian, was now in a position to realize a gain from any such arrangement. Percy had to have

more and more recourse to the usurer.

The arrival from England of an eccentric aunt of Léontine helped Jeannette to realize her plans. Tante Judith was hoping to arrange a match between her son and Alice Castel. So bizarre was the aunt's appearance that the clever Jeannette decided to impersonate her at the next costume ball. She bribed a servant to borrow articles of her clothing so that she could copy them. There was an unexpected stroke of good luck. The death of one of Léontine's relatives caused the family to be away all day at the funeral. Jeannette, dressed in the aunt's attire, including hat and veil, went to the Royal Street jeweler, who was to mount some stones for the eccentric English lady. Posing as the lady, Jeannette collected the stones and left. By chance she ran into Yvon Kernoke outside the store. The scene that follows lacks any semblance of verisimilitude. Jeannette told Yvon that she had left "Les Mûriers" in anger and that she did not want her present whereabouts known to the family. Yvon had offered to drive her home. Jeannette accepted his offer of a ride, but said she had to blindfold him on the way to her new location. Yvon was permitted to remove his blindfold in a house he had never seen before. He accepted a cup of coffee that was heavily drugged. Upon awakening, he reached for a glass of water

that was also drugged. It took him over two days to recover from the effects of the opiates. Meanwhile, his absence and the removal of the stones had made him a prime suspect for robbery. The fantastic story he told on his return hardly reassured his employer.

The famous lawyer, Etienne Mazureau, was engaged to defend Yvon.¹² On hearing Yvon recall the events, Mazureau observed that the impersonation appeared to be that of an unusually accomplished actress. Léontine became uneasy. She thought of Jeannette, a clever actress, but did not mention her suspicions. Mazureau got a month's delay in the trial.

Other events were taking place. A girl, Mathilde Angèle, was born to Percy and Gina. It was also during this period that the effects of dissipation began to show on Percy's health. There was no longer any doubt that he had the family disease. He was also enjoying Violetta's company.

The trial itself started in routine accusations and character defense with the prosecution having the better case.

¹²The name is authentic. Etienne Mazureau shared honors with Edward Livingston at the top of the legal profession. The historical Mazureau was middle-aged in 1828; our author described a younger man. Vide Fossier, op. cit., pp. 152-55.

Yvon would have lost the case except for a chance remark of Horace Delmond. Horace told Gothe that dishonor was facing the Castel family unless something happened to reverse the course of the trial. Gothe then began to realize that she herself was possibly an unwitting partner in the crime inasmuch as she was keeping a valuable box for Jeannette, who would not divulge its contents. She took the box from its hiding place, opened it, and saw the stones. The box was returned to Mazureau via Leontine, who refused to tell how it came into her possession. Mazureau's presentation of the jewels in court had the effect of a coup de théâtre. Jeannette ran from the court without waiting to hear more. Horace feared for Gothe's safety.

Jeannette reached home in a paroxysm of rage. She picked up a pistol and a dagger-like letter opener and would have rushed out to kill Gothe and Leontine, had not a blood vessel burst in her chest. She fell to the floor with blood trickling from her mouth. When she regained consciousness, she learned that Leontine had not denounced her in court. At first, she did not realize the gravity of her physical condition. Word of her illness had reached Gothe, who came to comfort her and urge her to repent:

Ce que tu as fait était bien mal Jeannette ...

Songez-y! par ta faute un innocent pouvait être condamné! Ah! voudrais-tu mourir avec un pareil péché sur la conscience? Voudrais-tu mourir sans implorer la clémence de Dieu?

--Dieu! s'écria Adoréah avec un rire moqueur, un rire qui faisait mal à entendre ... As-tu la folie de croire que Dieu s'occupe de moi? de moi Adoréah la quarteronne?

--Oh! Jeannette! ne blasphème pas ainsi! s'écria Gothe.

La jeune quarteronne regarda sa soeur en silence. Maintenant les mots s'échappaient de ses lèvres en sons saccadés. On devinait qu'elle faisait des efforts sur-humains pour les prononcer. Elle s'inquiétait peu d'être entendue. On eût dit au contraire qu'elle désirait l'être. --Dieu! s'écria-t-elle en élevant la voix. Sais-tu à quoi il me fait penser? Ecoute ma théorie, tu pourras plus tard entendre celle de l'abbé Mouny. Ton Dieu, sans le moindre doute s'ennuie tout seul dans son beau paradis ... il nous a créés pour l'amuser, pour faire de nous ses jouets ... Pour lui, ce monde est un théâtre dont nous sommes les acteurs ou plutôt les marionnettes ... il rit de nos peines, de nos joies ..., il bat ses mains devant les scènes engendrées par nos passions ... tant que nous l'amusons, il nous regarde avec plaisir ... mais quand vient le moment où il en a assez de nous, les êtres qu'il a créés pour servir à son amusement, il fait de nous ce que la petite Léo [fille de Gothe] fait de ses jouets, il nous brise sans nous jeter un regard de regret, et, tournant les pages du livre de la vie, cherche des yeux de nouveaux drames et de nouveaux acteurs.¹³

Jeannette-Adoréah barely had time to see Gina's daughter whom she covered with her necklace, bracelets, and other jewelry in a sort of baptismal rite for the world she would probably embrace. The author took the opportunity to moralize:

Oh! moquerie du sort! Dans ce même salon où elle avait dansé quelques semaines auparavant, où si souvent elle avait reçu les hommages d'une foule d'admirateurs, en ce moment, sur une longue table, froide, insensible,

¹³De la Houssaye, Gina, MS, loc. cit., pp. 544-45.

morte, était étendue Adoréah la quarteronne!¹⁴

Meanwhile Léontine had begun to realize that Percy was frequenting the worst company and ruining his health. She still did not know that he had had a child by Gina.

About six weeks after Jeannette's death, Yvon de Kernokey and Alice Castel were married. They went to Europe and settled in his native Brittany.

Angèle, the daughter of Percy and Gina, was now almost a year old and bore unmistakable traits of the Castel family. Her resemblance to Léontine was striking. Percy had little care for the baby or Gina, as Violetta was still occupying his entire attention. Finally, a realization of his impending death and Violetta's utter callousness (e.g., she feared that he would have a hemorrhage and ruin her rugs) brought him home.

Léontine then learned of Angèle's existence. Percy, barely twenty-eight years old, dictated his will. He wanted Gina to go to France with Horace and Gothe and marry there, but Gina said she would not marry. Angèle was to be placed in a convent at the age of seven and kept there until her eighteenth birthday.

Léontine, whose philosophy mirrored the Amor vincit

¹⁴Ibid., p. 549.

omnia thinking of the author, assured Gina that God would reward her for the happiness she had given her son: "Soyez bénie, mon enfant, dit-elle, pour les quelques jours de bonheur que vous avez donné à mon fils: j'espère que Dieu vous le rendra."¹⁵

Five weeks after Percy's death, Horace and his family joined Gina on a boat for Europe. Their first stop was Liverpool, where Horace and Gothe had their union solemnized.

The author invites us to leave the characters and join them fifteen years later. Léontine is now in her fifties. Alice and Yvon have six children. Gina had married a rich watchmaker two years after settling in France, and they have five children.

We skip over the years and again visit the expatriates after the Civil War. Léontine wanted to see Gothe and Angèle again, so she sailed for France. "Les Mûriers" was closed once again. Léontine found Angèle in love with the son of Horace and Gothe. They, too, were married. Léontine remained in France.

Ten years later we find Léontine too old to return to New Orleans, but dreaming of Yvon and Alice living in "Les Mûriers." The author reluctantly left her characters at this point.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 605.

Gina, which began in serialized form on February 25, 1895, was followed by Dahlia, which ran from the spring of 1897 to July 30, 1898 in Le Meschacébé.¹⁶

Dahlia

Dahlia, as did Gina, opens with long histories of the main characters before they meet. The first part is called "Petite" in the printed version; it bears no title in the manuscript.

Babette, a rather unattractive mulâtresse, operated a boarding house on Toulouse Street near Levee Street (present-day Decatur Street). Part of her house was occupied by Nicholas Monier and his family. Monier, a tinsmith-locksmith, was a Frenchman, who had legally married a quadroon.

Célina was Babette's daughter. José Dalvéras, a Mexican sea captain, took a fancy to Célina; and Babette quickly arranged to sell the unsuspecting child. Later Babette claimed that her daughter was kidnapped. Three years after this transaction, José Dalvéras brought Célina back to New Orleans for the birth of her first child. Célina died in childbirth. The

¹⁶The beginning date is not known for certain because of the incompleteness of the existing files of Le Meschacébé. Part III was running in October, 1897. Basing our estimate on the time Parts II and III ran, we may assume that Part I started in May or June of 1897.

captain made arrangements for the child's care and education. Entrusting the infant to Babette, he went back to sea.

Babette, whose parsimony was legendary, neglected to have the girl baptized: "Le baptême, ça coûte une piastre ... et ma petite belle n'a pas besoin de ce gris-gris."¹⁷ As a consequence, the child was simply called "Petite." She actually picked her own name when she was about six years old. Benoît, a kindly old gardener in the neighborhood, befriended the child, and, under his tutelage, she developed a liking for flowers. It was a natural step for her to assume the name of Dahlia, her favorite flower.

When Dahlia was about seven years old, her father returned and found her unchristened and uneducated save for the rudiments of reading that Benoît had taught her. Her mother's grave had been neglected. José Dalvéras had it cleaned and a monument erected: "En payant, on obtient tout."¹⁸ This is the first of many references to the efficacy of money in Dahlia.

Realizing that there were no educational opportunities for Negroes in New Orleans, her father sent Dahlia to a convent

¹⁷De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 11.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 75.

in Baltimore, where she was to remain ten years.

Part II deals with the background of Dahlia's future lover. Unfortunately, we do not know the title of this part. The beginning is missing in the serialized version as well as in the unpublished printed version. The manuscript itself has no divisions except chapters which are not titled.

As in Gina, we are introduced to a family of British ancestry. In this case it is the Ashton family. (One wonders if the name came from Sir Walter Scott's Bride of Lammermoor, as Scott was one of our author's favorite writers.)

Sir Richard Ashton settled in Pointe Coupée Parish on an estate called "Les Lilas."¹⁹ With him were his two sons--Gerald, aged seventeen, and Valéry five years younger. The former was born of an English mother and the latter of a Spanish mother. Both wives had died before his arrival in Louisiana. The Spanish wife appears to have been a victim of Sir Richard's unfounded jealousy. Only his wealth prevented complications with the police: "L'argent est une aide puissante."²⁰ In Pointe Coupée and the surrounding parishes his cruelty to his slaves was well known. This stereotype

¹⁹In Violetta the estate was "Les Magnolias"; in Gina it was "Les Mûriers."

²⁰De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 100.

was found in the travelers' accounts, including one our author seems to have known.²¹

Sir Richard took Babette, a fifteen-year old mulâtresse for his housekeeper. She soon became the mistress of Gerald. Five years later Célima was born.²² Valéry, unaware that his brother was the father, was fond of Babette's child.

Gerald's happiness was destroyed by the sudden announcement that he was to marry the daughter of his father's school friend. Lena Godwin was short, fat, slightly lame, and possessed of bad teeth and tinted hair. There was one mitigating circumstance--a dowry of \$200,000. Gerald and Lena were married. The following year she gave birth to a son, but lost him at the age of two months.

Shortly after the death of his first grandson, Sir Richard Ashton died. In his delirium he said that Valéry was not his son. A flashback to the time of his second marriage

²¹"Persons from New England, France, or England, becoming slave-holders, are found to be the most severe masters and mistresses, however good their tempers may always have appeared previously. They cannot, like the native proprietor sit waiting half an hour for the second course, or see everything done in the worst possible manner, their rooms dirty, their property wasted, their plans frustrated . . ." Martineau, Society in America, p. 109.

²²The manuscript, loc. cit., p. 110, has Célima born three years after the liaison began.

is given. He intercepted a compromising letter he thought addressed to his wife. He had her held virtually a prisoner in the inhospitable north country of Scotland. The combined strain was too much for her and she died. After her death he learned that she was innocent.

Valéry, who was still unmarried, was embarking on a career in law with Henri Lachamp. Later he will marry Laure Lachamp a cousin of his partner.

Gerald's marriage was understandably beset by many problems. Lena visited New Orleans for three months and returned to find Babette ensconced as mistress of the house. Lena avenged herself in different ways; among other things she taught her parrot to greet Celima with: "Bonjour, Célima; bonjour, petite batârde."²³

Lena had another boy, who also died in infancy. She herself died very soon after the death of her second child.

The years passed and Gerald, now about thirty-five years old, had the appearance of a much older man. He married Pauline Lachamp, his sister-in-law's younger sister only to lose her in childbirth. The child, however, lived and was named Camille. He became morose and withdrawn and even

²³De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 161.

temporarily rejected Camille.

Valéry Ashton, who had two boys, Gerald and Valéry, died three months after his brother's second marriage. He specified that his will be read when the older boy was twenty: " ... alors tu [Gerald] la lui feras lire ainsi qu'à Valéry; et tu leur feras jurer tous deux de se soumettre aveuglement aux dernières volontés exprimées dans cette lettre."²⁴ Where our author acquired the notion of this irrational sense of duty is not clear.

Far more shocking than any provision of the elder Valéry's will was his brother's insistence that Gerald marry his cousin Camille. The fact that Camille loved Valéry was not considered. Valéry could not bear the thought of witnessing such a marriage; he left for Europe. When he returned about a year later, Camille had given birth to Hélène.

Part III, entitled "Valéry et Dahlia," begins with Dahlia's return to New Orleans after ten years in a Baltimore convent. In Baltimore she bore no stigma; no one knew she was a quadroon. She alone of all the quadroons, grew up in an environment free of discrimination. Accepted as white, she had no reason to suspect that she was not. She was patently

²⁴Ibid., p. 24.

not conditioned for a role among the "gens de couleur libres," who were only technically free. One thinks of her male counterpart in Cable's Grandissimes. Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., was educated in Europe and treated as the equal of his all white half-brother. When they returned to their native Louisiana, they assumed a distant and totally unnatural relationship. Significantly, of all the characters in Cable's novel, it was Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., who committed suicide.

Dahlia was surprised to find her grandmother so uncouth, but being properly reared she thought it not her place to criticize her elders, especially her relatives. Her reactions were mixed when she met the heroines of the first two stories of the series. She did not hesitate to reject Violetta and her coarse manners. Octavia, who was more compatible, won Dahlia's confidence, a confidence that she hoped to betray on the first opportunity.

The question of a classmate's mother led to the revelation for Dahlia that she was different. Mrs. Fremont asked Dahlia where she lived, and when Dahlia gave her address, Mrs. Fremont asked if she lived en pension. Dahlia innocently replied that she lived with her grandmother. Mrs. Fremont then told her she was nothing but a quadroon, whereupon Dahlia

fainted. A stranger came to her aid. He was Valéry Ashton.²⁵

When she recovered Dahlia asked Gothe about the charge, and Gothe assured her that it was true. She told her own story as a warning to Dahlia and added that her own grandmother would try to sell her. It would be hard to imagine a more typically Romantic statement than Gothe's parting words to Dahlia. She showed herself to be a worthy sister of Antony and Chatterton:

Pauvre enfant! s'écria Gothe, ne t'ai-je pas dit que les quarteronnes sont les parias de la société? La seule porte ouverte sous leurs pas est le déshonneur ou la mort. La même loi qui défend aux blancs d'épouser l'une de nous défend de recevoir les quarteronnes dans aucune institution publique. ... Une quarteronne n'a même pas le droit de se consacrer au seigneur et je te le répète Dahlia, nous sommes maudites!²⁶

Dahlia learned that Babette had sold her mother to José Dalvéras. She learned, too, that Benoît had left her a good income that Babette was trying to steal.

It was a shock for Dahlia to learn that the young man she had just met was her cousin. She and Valéry had attended several balls and were becoming fond of each other. Shaken by the revelation of Valéry's kinship to her, she decided to avoid the degradation that many quadroons slipped into. She

²⁵De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 266.

²⁶Ibid., p. 283.

wrote to her convent school in Baltimore and asked that she be admitted to the convent.

Valéry, too, was uneasy, but from other reasons. His mother and uncle were urging him to marry and he had no desire to marry at that time. Dahlia was making an effort to keep her emotions in check. She refused an invitation to the opera, where Joconde was playing. The allusion to this work indicates, not an anachronism,²⁷ but evidence that Madame de la Houssaye had newspapers of the era of which she was purportedly painting the moeurs. Joconde was indeed being performed at that time, but it was the obscure Joconde of Nicolo Isouard.²⁸ This information must have come from the newspapers, as our author was not well versed in opera. Only a few pages before this allusion, she spoke of Rossini and Verdi replacing Gluck in the public's favor.²⁹ Verdi, who was born in 1813, was not in the public's favor at the time of this novel.

Gothé continued her efforts to convince Dahlia that marriage to Valéry was impossible. Dahlia, pending notification of acceptance from the convent in Baltimore, continued

²⁷As several operatic anachronisms precede this statement, it would be logical to assume that she was referring to Amilcare Ponchielli's La Gioconda first performed in 1876.

²⁸Louisiana Gazette (New Orleans), February 28, 1820.

²⁹De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 337.

to see Valery. She attended another ball, where Violetta and Pierre Saulvé were observed. Also noted was a Brazilian millionaire with the unimaginative name of don Orlando Trocadero. Don Orlando was in a ridiculous costume, but no one criticized it: "De plus l'argent fait loi partout et personne n'aurait osé contredire un homme aussi riche que celui-ci."³⁰

The Brazilian showed considerable interest in Dahlia. He told her bluntly that he would have her as wife or mistress. Valery offered his protection, but she was not sure of his intentions. To complicate her problems was young Nicolas Monier, who asked her to marry him. She was not inclined to favor the suit of the son of a quadroon. Her anxiety mounted as she awaited word from the convent. Octavia urged Dahlia to accept Don Orlando's proposals:

Voyez-vous, Dahlia, il faut être raisonnable ... Notre sort à nous quarteronnes n'est pas celui des femmes blanches et nous devons l'accepter comme la destinée nous l'a fait ... Les Blanches se marient et nous, nous nous plaçons.³¹

She further argued that even the most virtuous, like Gothe, eventually "placed" themselves and that, moreover, don Orlando's money would remove any obstacles: " ... avec de

³⁰Ibid., p. 355.

³¹Ibid., p. 398.

l'argent on vient à bout de tous les obstacles."³²

Dahlia's resolution was shaken after a visit to Gothe, who assured her that her conscience was clear. Horace Delmond had sworn on a crucifix that he would marry Gothe. Dahlia still debated with lessening conviction. A letter from the convent in Baltimore dashed her hopes. She was advised that she would do better to marry "un homme de couleur"; the convent would not accept her.³³

Mme Lebon, who ran a nursing home on Rampart Street, tried to persuade Dahlia to follow the nun's advice. She herself had married "un homme de couleur" after being spurned by a white man. Madame Lebon was a quadroon who had maintained her self-respect and virtue; she had no regrets.

The Brazilian intensified his efforts to obtain Dahlia by any means or at any price. He enlisted the aid of Babette and of her servant, Malvina, who offered Dahlia drugged tea. Dahlia realized what was happening as soon as she tasted the tea. Don Orlando entered her room, but fled at the sound of Nicolas Monier's steps. Nicolas, who had been alerted to the danger, chased Don Orlando and fired at him. Don Orlando,

³²Ibid., p. 399.

³³Ibid., p. 408.

hit in the shoulder, attributed the shot to Valéry.

Dahlia was in critical condition after drinking the drugged tea. It appeared that she had heart trouble just as her mother had. Valéry visited her and received an offer of marriage. He rejected the suggestion, saying that it was unnecessary and might even ruin him by alienating his friends and family.

Dahlia was now willing to accept Nicolas Monier's offer, and she made known her intentions. An accident, however, precipitated her into the arms of Valéry. She read that Valéry had been stabbed by two unknown assailants. His condition left no room for hope of recovery. Dahlia decided to sacrifice herself, if it would save Valéry. She took up a vigil at his bedside and did not leave him until he showed improvement. Their liaison was then official, and a house was prepared for them as Valéry continued his convalescence. Dahlia had no time for thoughts or repentance or regrets. Nicolas Monier was the only one saddened by the events; he left the city never to return.

Valéry's health improved steadily while Dahlia's health still gave cause for concern. Her doctor said she would do well if happy, but warned that unhappiness could kill her. The reader thinks of Kitty Bell in Vigny's Chatterton as he

follows Dahlia's condition.

Dahlia and Valéry spent two blissful years together. The birth of a son increased their happiness. Valéry wanted to marry in France, return to Louisiana, and then settle permanently in France after his mother's death.

The other members of the family were not so fortunate. Yellow Fever took its toll at "Les Lilas." Gerald and his infant daughter perished along with many slaves. A second daughter, also called Héléne, was born to Camille several months after Gerald's death.

Dahlia became pregnant again. Her son was already causing some concern. Valéry introduced the boy as his son. His acquaintances did not know that he was married; they were understandably confused about the boy's status.

Valéry's Uncle Gerald had a stroke. Another crisis was forthcoming. Valéry listened to his uncle's dying requests: "On ne doit rien refuser aux mourants."³⁴ It is probable that his uncle was aware of his liaison. To avoid further trouble, he demanded that Valéry marry his daughter Camille. Camille was his sister-in-law, his first cousin, and also a widow of recent date, but Uncle Gerald had thoughtfully taken care of

³⁴Ibid., p. 518.

the necessary church dispensations. Valéry agreed to the wedding, though he believed that he was yielding to the caprice of a mentally incompetent person. He told Camille that he would regard her as a sister, and he reminded her that a marriage under duress could be annulled.

Dahlia's second pregnancy was a severe strain, and Valéry feared for her life, and she did in fact die giving birth to Célima, named for her grandmother. The venerable Père Antoine said Dahlia's only crime was loving too much.³⁵ In her last hours she met Camille, who had been sent an anonymous account of Valéry's activities. She and Dahlia agreed that the children should be sent to France.

In "Hélène," the fourth and last part of Dahlia, the author skips rapidly over the years. At the age of twelve, Helene was sent to St. Michael's convent on the Mississippi River in St. James Parish. Val, as Valéry's son was called, and his sister Célima eventually finished their education in France. Hélène was always told that the children in France were the offspring of a former marriage of Valéry. Notwithstanding the separation during their adolescence, Val and Hélène discovered many mutual interests through their correspondence.

³⁵Ibid., p. 458.

At the age of eighteen, Célima married a French count. Shortly after the wedding, Val returned to Louisiana for the first time in many years. He and Héléne, who had become infatuated through their correspondence, realized that they were in love. Val told his father of his love and his intention to marry Héléne. Valéry was horrified. There could be no marriage, he said. Val thought that his father opposed the marriage because of consanguinity, and Valéry in extreme distress, tried to explain the position of "gens de couleur libres":

Et alors d'une voix qu'il essayait en vain d'affermir Valéry mit sous les yeux de son fils la situation qu'occupaient à la Louisiane les gens de couleur libres. Il parla des préjugés qui faisaient d'eux les véritables parias de la société.

Comme fait le chirurgien qui déchire la plaie qu'il essaie de guerir, Valéry ne cacha rien à son fils. Il lui dit l'anathème qui pesait sur cette race maudite.

Ils n'ont pas le droit d'occuper la moindre place dans leur pays, dit-il. Même le pouvoir de voter leur est interdit. Dans toute affaire criminelle ou officielle, leur témoignage est refusé. Aucune personne respectable ne s'associera à un mulâtre et ne s'assoira à la même table que lui. Au théâtre, comme en tout lieu public, ils occupent une place particulière et la loi défend le mariage entre les blancs et les gens de couleur.³⁶

Val listened patiently without seeing the relevancy of his father's remarks until Valéry told him that he was one of these parias. Val was stunned and then angry at his father

³⁶Ibid., p. 494. (This is not an error. The pagination goes from 1 to 535 and then begins again on p. 436.)

for not marrying Dahlia and for hurting so noble a person.

Val told H  l  ne what he had learned and said that, if he had known the truth, he would not have courted her. H  l  ne's answer recalls Antony's less passionate avowal to La Vicomtesse de Lacy that he would marry an orphan, because he considered himself above prejudices: " ... qui voudrait   pouser une orpheline? ... Moi ... peut-  tre, parce que je suis au-dessus des pr  jug  s."³⁷

Qu'importe si une quarteronne   tait ta m  re?
n'es-tu pas le fils de mon oncle? Qu'importe le
sang qui coule dans tes veines? Je t'aime, Val!
Et malgr   les obstacles qui s'  l  vent entre nous,
malgr   l'opinion de mes parents, malgr   l'arr  t
d'une soci  t   que je m  prise, je serai ta femme!³⁸

They decided to leave home, marry in another state, and sail for Europe. "Nous ne reviendrons jamais    la Louisiane, dans ce pays des pr  jug  s."³⁹ Apprised of their departure and marriage, Val  ry regretted that he had not taken the same course with Dahlia. Val  ry and Camille did pay the young couple a lengthy visit in Paris, where they saw a veritable colony of quadroon expatriates. After Val  ry's death in Louisiana, Camille returned to France to live permanently.

³⁷ Dumas p  re, Antony, Act II, Scene IV.

³⁸ De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 499.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 501.

Judgments

Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans ends with a plea for forgiveness reminiscent of Cable's Madame Delphine. Cable's Père Jérôme simply borrowed the last words of Stephen, the first Christian martyr: "Lord lay not this sin to her charge!" Stephen had said: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."⁴¹ Mme de la Houssaye expressed the same thought less succinctly:

Et maintenant, lecteur, ma tâche est terminée! j'ai mis sous tes yeux différents types de quarteronnes. Mais lorsque la voix s'élèvera pour vouer au mépris des femmes comme Octavia, Violetta et Adoréah, sois indulgent pour ces douces créatures Gothe, Gina et Dahlia, poussées par la fatalité dans le sentier du mal, et plus dignes de pitié que de mépris.⁴²

The author's own words destroyed much of the illusion she was trying to create. The unfortunate choice of the word "types," however true it may be, does not enhance the literary value of her work. The fact that she could so definitively classify her characters suggests an elementary psychology. The plea for pity based on the "fatalité" involved indicates a romantic conception of a problem that had naturalistic possibilities. Instead of environmental determinism or

⁴¹Acts, VII, 60.

⁴²De la Houssaye, Dahlia, MS, loc. cit., p. 508.

heredity she offered "fatalité," as the influence in the lives of these characters--a concept long dead in France. Mme Kail noted the general tendency of the Louisiana writers to lag behind their French contemporaries. Speaking of the Louisiana French novels in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, she said:

... ils reflètent des tendances qui s'étaient manifestées en Europe au début du siècle, mais qui étaient depuis longtemps dépassées. En effet, la période 1870-1900 voit en France le plein essor du mouvement réaliste.⁴³

Throughout this extended treatment of Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans we have had several points in mind. Not the least of these points is that we are still waiting for a thorough and accurate description of these women. We have attempted to prove that Madame de la Houssaye did not write the romans de mœurs which she aspired to write. Anyone having the travelers' accounts and a few old newspapers had access to as much information as she had. The allusions to "faits historiques" were demonstrably false. On many occasions she resorted to the face-saving technique of "Il m'est impossible de décrire ...". She simply did not have a command of the information necessary for "une étude de mœurs."

⁴³Kail, loc. cit., p. 5.

Certain common points were noted in passing, e.g., Violetta was called "la Miette" and Dahlia, "Petite." The names of the homes had a common source--"Les Magnolias," "Les Lilas," and "Les Mûriers."

The moralizing--more common in the first two stories, with particular reference to Latin villains and Jewish usurers--tended to diminish, and there was a perceptible progression in virtue in the course of the series. Octavia ended with a curse, Dahlia with an exoneration. Gina and Dahlia were classically Romantic--if we may use such a figure. An explanation is in order.

The spirit of one giant of Romanticism permeates this series--Alexandre Dumas père, a quadroon.⁴⁴ One would be tempted to call him the sole inspiration of the series, if we did not know of the travelers' stories, the old newspapers, and the vogue of quadroon stories.

Starting with Octavia, the influence of Dumas père is patent and continuous. Alfred D__, the principal male character, probably owes his name to a friend of Dumas simply called D__ in Les Frères corses. Every quadroon orgy recalled

⁴⁴His grandfather, the Marquis de la Pailleterie, had a natural son by a nègresse, named Dumas, in Haiti. His father was the mulatto general. He was, therefore, a quadroon. This is an interesting coincidence; the point should not be labored.

those of the La Tour de Nesle, a perennial favorite of the Romantic theatre. We learn that a necklace wanted by Octavia was the necklace in the "affaire du collier." Dumas père wrote a highly romantic reconstruction of the events surrounding this in Le Collier de la Reine. The ending of Octavia was probably inspired by the ending of Antony.

In Violetta we find a masked ball reminiscent of Henri III et sa cour. There are more references to the débauches à la tour de Nesle. A scene between Pierre Saulvé and his wife was copied from the theatrical scene in Henri III et sa cour in which the Duc de Guise makes his wife write a letter of assignation against her will.

Gina and Dahlia owe more to Antony. In these two novels the fate of the pariah is brought into focus. Both women knew they were "maudites." Antony never knew his father; he did not even have a surname. Gina and Dahlia knew who their fathers were, but they were just as illegitimate as Antony. All three were conscious of being victims of fate and society. Dahlia, especially, was conceived with the "ange déchu" image in mind.

Again, we reaffirm that the work was essentially romantic in conception. Our author was probably trying to give "une tranche de vie," but she had not mastered the "forme" of naturalism. She wanted to exploit its "fond," but she naturally

turned to romanticism as the vehicle of her expression.

Auguste Viatte has gone astray in attempting to read too much into Les Quarterrones de la Nouvelle-Orléans. He visualized it as social protest. Speaking of this series which he classified as a roman-fleuve, he said:

Il a du mouvement, de la saveur; et nous devons relever, à l'honneur de la littérature louisianaise, que ses trois meilleurs productions dans ce genre, L'Habitation Saint-Ybars [Alfred Mercier], Le vieux Salomon [Charles Testut] et Les Quarteronnes, représentent autant de protestations contre le préjugé de couleur.⁴⁵

What has been said before of the Romantic inspiration of the work eliminates such lofty didactic purposes. Plainly stated, Madame de la Houssaye could not afford the luxury of didacticism. Moreover, had she wanted to teach, she would have chosen a current subject, not an extinct problem. The history of the quadroons was à la mode, and she attempted to capitalize on the vogue.

One of the best lines Madame de la Houssaye ever wrote (and one worthy to be compared to some of the best sallies, say of a Cocteau) was unintentional, I believe. It was her own evaluation of Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans: "C'est licencieux, immoral, demi-monde, mais c'est magnifique!"⁴⁶

⁴⁵Viatte, op. cit., p. 295.

⁴⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, March 29, 1887.

CHAPTER V

THE MAJOR LOUISIANA NOVELS

Published Novels

In June, 1887, during the course of his only visit to Madame de la Houssaye's home in Franklin, George W. Cable had suggested that she write an Acadian novel. Pouponne et Balthazar was the result. Appearing in April, 1888, it was accorded a warm welcome by the editor of Le Franco-Louisianais, although it was published by the rival Journal de l'Opinion.¹ "Tous les coeurs avides d'émotions douces liront avec plaisir cette dernière oeuvre d'une femme qu'on aime à écouter, qu'on aime surtout à lire."²

The manuscript, in Volume XVII of the de la Houssaye Collection, numbers 131 pages. The plot is similar to and as simple as that of Longfellow's Evangeline. There are no Evangeline Bellefontaine and Gabriel Lajeunesse. We have Pouponne Theriot and Balthazar Landry. The names are less

¹Mme S. de la Houssaye, Pouponne et Balthazar, Nouvelle Acadienne (Nouvelle-Orléans: Librairie de l'Opinion, 1888).

²Le Franco-Louisianais (New Orleans), April 21, 1888.

euphonious, but they are unquestionably more authentically Acadian than the poet's.

Unlike the poem, the nouvelle has a happy ending. After the many vicissitudes of an exile, Balthazar finally locates his father. He could do little more than witness his last moments on earth. A few days after his father's funeral, and heeding the last request of the latter, he married Pouponne. Their Acadian wedding ("noces de Cadiens") is vividly described. The action is especially vigorous.³ One wonders why the editors of an anthology chose a relatively colorless description of Acadian costumes in preference to the "noces de Cadiens."⁴

The late Professor Ditchy cited the early pages of Pouponne et Balthazar in the glossary of Les Acadiens louisianais et leur parler:⁵

Cadie (Petite), premier établissement des Acadiens en Louisiane. Ils avaient, dit Madame S. de la Houssaye, au bord du Mississippi, un grand village, ou plutôt une cinquantaine de plantations ... Cette colonie, qui occupait un espace d'une douzaine de milles, avait

³De la Houssaye, Pouponne et Balthazar, pp. 181-203.

⁴France d'Amérique, eds. Simone de la Souchère Deléry and Gladys Renshaw (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1932), pp. 155-56.

⁵Jay K. Ditchy, Les Acadiens louisianais et leur parler (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1932), pp. 64-65.

reçu des colons le nom de Petite Acadie; mais les Louisianais ne l'appelaient que du nom des Acadiens. Pendant des années elle conservait ce nom, et aujourd'hui même [1932] bien des habitants disent encore les Acadiens en parlant de la Paroisse Saint-Jacques.⁶

It is not unlikely that Felix Voorhies borrowed from Pouponne et Balthazar. He, too, in the now "official" story of Evangeline has an ancient grandmother recollecting the past.⁷

Charles et Ella was serialized from October 24, 1891 to January 9, 1892 in Le Meschacébé. The editor of that paper recommended it in a notice entitled "Notre Feuilleton":

Nous commençons aujourd'hui la publication d'un nouveau feuilleton: Charles et Ella, roman louisianais, dont les incidents merveilleux se passent dans une paroisse créole. Ce n'est pas un roman imaginé, mais une relation de faits qui se sont accomplis sous les yeux de l'auteur, Mme. S de la Houssaye, que beaucoup de nos lecteurs connaissent déjà par ses charmantes productions littéraires. Nous sommes heureux de pouvoir leur offrir le primeur de Charles et Ella, convaincus qu'ils liront avec autant de plaisir que d'intérêt.⁸

Charles et Ella was published in a slim (45 page) volume

⁶Ibid., pp. 64-65.

⁷Felix Voorhies, Acadian Reminiscences (Opelousas, La.: The Jacob News Depot Co., 1907), p. 18.

⁸Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré [Reserve], La.), October 21, 1891.

after it was serialized.⁹ The seventy-six page manuscript found in Volume XX of the de la Houssaye Collection is not called "Charles et Ella," but "Un Roman à Franklin."

The story of Charles et Ella is simple and, at the same time, fantastic beyond belief. Charles Stuart, a young man from the primitive Bayou Portage area only two miles from Franklin, made his living selling fish and game to the residents of that town. His lack of education and shyness made it painful for him to approach even his regular customers. Notwithstanding his shyness, he did see enough of a customer's daughter, Ella Moreland, to fall in love with her. The utter disparity of their backgrounds made any serious relationship unthinkable. The reader is ready to accept this, when he gains a new insight in a flashback. He learns that Charles' father is not simply a poor backwoodsman, but the ill-treated nephew of a Scottish lord. Money and a title are awaiting Charles' father, if he will only return to Scotland. He had left that country in disgust after suffering abuse from his uncle who coveted his inheritance. His own father had married beneath himself and his brother never forgave him until he, himself,

⁹Mme S. de la Houssaye, Charles et Ella, Roman Louisianais (Bonnet Carré [Reserve], La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1892).

lay dying and decided he would like Charles' father to have his lawful inheritance. The father decided to take his family to Scotland and settle the estate. Charles awkwardly expressed his love for Ella and promised that he would never forget her. She in turn promised to love him always.

Seven years later a handsome stranger danced with Ella at a ball in Franklin. She did not recognize Charles after his metamorphosis. It was not until the next day that she recognized the country urchin in this aristocrat. They married and spent their honeymoon visiting the courts of Europe.

Amis et Fortune began its feuilleton run in Le Meschacébé in July, 1892. It did not appear in a regular edition until the following year.¹⁰ The manuscript of this 558 page novel is no longer extant. We know from a letter to the author that it contained 350 pages.¹¹

The plot is as romantic as any that our author ever conceived. A wealthy Dutchman, named Van Austin, lived in the Tèche country with his two sons, Adrian and Heinrich. Adrian Van Austin had a daughter named Eleonore who would become Mrs.

¹⁰Mme S. de la Houssaye, Amis et Fortune (Bonnet Carré [Reserve], La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1893).

¹¹Letter from Charles Lasseigne, November 22, 1892, cited in Savoie, op. cit., p. 180.

Waford. Heinrich Van Austin had a dissolute son named Hugh. Hugh married a girl of questionable background and incurred the displeasure of his father who disinherited him. His wife died leaving him Blanche, an unattractive and slightly lame child.

Some years after the death of his wife, Hugh decided to start a new life in Australia. He sailed with his friend Henry Wilson and Henry's sister Annie. They hoped to make their fortune in sheep and in mining. The trip proved too much for the sickly Blanche; she died at sea. Hugh married Annie Wilson shortly after their arrival in Australia. They had a girl who was also named Blanche.

Hugh's success was marred by the death of first his partner and then his wife. He decided to return to the United States. His own health was undermined and he barely had time to entrust his daughter to a friend when they landed in New York. News of the family wealth had preceded them. Blanche was justifiably suspicious of the now solicitous relatives who had ostracized her father. She decided to employ a simple stratagem to fathom their real feelings. This was made easy by the fact that the family had been out of contact for almost twenty years. Blanche's tutor, Esther Jenkins, was the approximate age Hugh's first child would have been, had she lived.

Esther even had a slight limp. It was agreed that Esther and Blanche would swap names and roles.

Eleonore Van Austin, now Mrs. Waford, dreamed of arranging a match between her son Mortimer and the heiress. Her plans were thwarted by her son Alphonse whom she considered the least likely suitor for Blanche's hand. Alphonse, a shy, sincere young man, fell in love with Blanche under the guise of Esther. Blanche played her role long enough to learn the truth about her relatives. She then made known her identity and married Alphonse and thereafter helped many needy people in the area.

Unpublished Novels

Neither Charles et Ella nor Amis et Fortune were mentioned in Madame de la Houssaye's correspondence to Cable. She probably considered them too conventionally romantic to be of literary interest to Cable or to a publisher outside her native state. She did mention "Claire" which was also a Louisiana novel. We noted in her biography that she claimed the work was published. The lack of evidence to support this claim was also noted. "Claire," known to have been written before September, 1885,¹² was immediately preceded by "Frère

¹²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

et soeur." The manuscript of this generally ignored work runs to 425 pages in Volumes XII, XIII, and XIV of the de la Houssaye Collection. Had "Frère et soeur" been known to Tinker et al., Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans would not have appeared to them as a shocking and radical departure.

As a transitional piece between her earlier stylized romanticism and the more realistic treatment of infidelity in "Claire" and Les Quarteronnes, "Frère et soeur" makes interesting reading to a degree. Half-way through the novel, the reader becomes surfeited on a diet of patricide, incest, infanticide, suicide, and accidental and sudden deaths. Action following the suicide of the brother tends to be repetitious and an epilogue of one hundred and fifteen pages is a serious drawback in any novel.

Several devices utilized in Les Quarteronnes are seen in their embryonic stage in "Frère et soeur." One notes, for example, a quadroon's vengeance on her white rival (Octavia), the sense of being "maudit" (Dahlia), the flaunting of the local mores and subsequent asylum of the lovers in France (Gina and Dahlia), an individual protecting a guilty party and ultimate justice in a theatrical courtroom scene (Gina), an "Amor vincit omnia" mentality, and the like. On the other hand, the almost total absence of Dumas père's influence would

be noticeable to a reader of Les Quarteronnes. One does find, however, several allusions to another favorite of our author--George Sand.

The narrator of "Frère et soeur" is M.B. who had heard the story in the course of one of his unsuccessful political campaigns in southwestern Louisiana near Opelousas. M.B. had lost his way while traveling from Lafayette to Opelousas. Night found him on the property of a Mr. Parsley who extended his hospitality. The contrast between Maria, his wife, and Mr. Parsley was striking. Why Maria was married to such an unattractive man puzzled M.B. He reported his impressions to Jacques Durand, his Creole friend in Opelousas. Durand was displeased to learn that M.B. had enjoyed Parsley's hospitality; he hastened to tell the reasons for his displeasure.

Some years before, Durand and Guillaume Hoffman, a German immigrant, had been field hands together and later partners in a successful cattle business. Durand married first. Hoffman married a little later and had four children: Georges, Marguerite, Emmanuel, and Maria. He died when his children were still young. Without the paternal hand to restrain and guide him, Emmanuel showed an early disposition for a life of débauche. He even struck his mother. Georges witnessed the scene. Emmanuel was sent by Georges to a boarding

school at Saint Martin. The move only served to increase Emmanuel's hatred for his brother. Away from home he gave even freer rein to his caprices.

Marguerite Hoffman married Alfred Seymour, an Englishman, over Emmanuel's objection. Jacques Durand never forgot the unnatural interest Emmanuel seemed to have in his sister Maria during the ceremony.

Paul Leduc, Emmanuel's classmate from St. Martin, started to court Maria. Paul was from a poor family and obviously living beyond his means. It was believed that Emmanuel was supplying the luxuries and thereby giving him tastes that he would not be able to satisfy legitimately. (One thinks of the pampered quadroon girls in Gina.) Paul was an opportunist; he was courting Maria solely because of her wealth.

Emanuel had yielded to family pressure in the meantime. He was now attending a northern college and apparently displaying a more wholesome interest in his sister. His new orientation was abruptly ended by a letter from Maria. She was finding it impossible to control Paul and she wanted her brother's help. When he returned home, he found that Paul had been rejected as a suitor. Paul's attitude and language are reminiscent of that of Julien Sorel in Le Rouge et le Noir. Poverty and attempting to rise above his social position were

also Paul's crimes:

Vous etes tous des lâches et des infâmes! Marie m'aime! Elle me l'a dit. Vous avez ordonné à cette enfant de me repousser; vous avez forcé son inclination ... et pourquoi je vous prie? parce que je suis pauvre sans doute, parce que je n'ai pas une fortune acquise, Dieu sait par quel moyen ...¹³

The husband of Marguerite responded to this tirade by slapping Paul in the face. The latter demanded satisfaction, and Alfred Seymour was seriously wounded in the duel which followed. This was only the beginning of serious trouble, for Paul planned to steal his own father's savings. To avert suspicion he feigned intoxication and allowed himself to be taken home early. As soon as his friends left him, he arose to carry out his plan. He accidentally awakened his father and the latter threatened to beat him. Paul panicked as his father advanced on him with a stick. In an instinctive movement of self-defense, he shot and mortally wounded his father. To protect the family name they swore to keep secret what had happened. The elder Leduc, though dying, cried out that he had shot himself. His wife and another son, Laurent, had witnessed the scene. They knew the truth, but agreed to support the suicide story. Unknown to them, the youngest son, Louis, had also seen the crime.

¹³Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Frère et soeur," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XIII, p. 68.

Mme Leduc and her son Laurent were arrested for complicity in the murder of M. Leduc. The family agreed that it was suicide, but the authorities would not accept their story without finding the weapon M. Leduc had used. In his confusion Paul had fled the scene with the weapon.

The trial has many of the elements of the trial in Gina. The family honor is at stake, the culprit is known, but protected, and there is a coup de théâtre in the courtroom that reverses the direction of the trial. In the present case, it is the testimony of the youngest Leduc boy which provides the drama. Promised that his brother would not be hanged; he identified him as the murderer. The promise was not kept, and Paul Leduc received a death sentence.

Emmanuel Hoffman tried unsuccessfully to free his friend Paul. (There is a successful jailbreak in Gina.) Prior to the attempted jailbreak, Emmanuel smuggled a pistol to him and told him to use it on himself if the escape attempt failed, advice that Paul was later constrained to follow. Paul, moreover, realized that his friend's situation was as unthinkable as his own, and he wrote a farewell note that warned of the dangerous inclination he was following. "Emmanuel, prends garde à toi! et souviens-toi que l'inceste aussi bien que le parricide sont des crimes que la loi punit de mort et que le monde envisage

avec horreur!¹⁴

The Leduc family was separated shortly after the deaths of Paul and his father. Mme Leduc died soon afterward. M. Durand adopted the youngest boy, Louis.

Paul Leduc's talk of love and passion had had an influence on Maria Hoffman. Her feelings were still vague, but she now had certain emotions that she had never known before. These feelings were heightened by their reading of the works of Dumas and Sand, and she and her brother seemed to be modern counterparts of Dante's condemned lovers, Paolo and Francesca.

At first Maria was able to reject Emmanuel's importunity. To counter her resistance, he took a quadroon mistress. He reasoned that Maria would yield to him to avoid a public scandal with a quadroon. The stratagem was not successful, as she naïvely parried his suggestions that his mistress could afford him pleasures that she could not. Indeed, it was only when a drunken Emmanuel forced himself on her that the crime was consummated. Repetition was easier and Maria became pregnant. Emmanuel went to Durand's slave who practiced folk medicine and tried to get an abortifacient from him. The slave refused saying he would have to have his master's permission. He wanted to stall long enough so that Durand could

¹⁴Ibid., p. 121.

see the man he was dealing with. In desperation Emmanuel asked his quadroon mistress if she recalled anything that her midwife mother had done to produce abortions. He even said that the birth of the child would bring dishonor on the family. Nanina, his mistress, assumed that it was Emmanuel's white mistress who was pregnant. She said she had no intention of helping the white wretch who was replacing her. She swore that she would avenge herself and set about to learn the identity of her rival. (The jilted quadroon mistress plays an important role in Octavia.)

Emmanuel and Maria went back to the slave to plead for an abortifacient, but this time they were observed by Durand. His suspicions were confirmed beyond any doubt. By an incredible chain of coincidences, Maria's delivery went almost unnoticed. An ignorant doctor attributed her changes to dropsy. Durand wanted to notify Mme Hoffman, but a sudden illness kept him confined to his bed. Mme Hoffman happened to be ill at the time of delivery. Emmanuel enlisted the aid of a slave sage-femme. Maria was told that the child would be stillborn. It was not. Emmanuel smothered the child Maria thought to be already dead. Mme Hoffman, who had been startled by the cries of Maria in labor, walked in just as Emmanuel was dispatching the infant.

Marguerite and Alfred were notified by Durand who received word at his home. They borrowed his carriage to go home. Marguerite mounted first and took the reins. The horse bolted under her light hand. Her husband tried to stop the carriage à la Antony. He was run over, and Marguerite drowned when the horse dragged her and the carriage into a bayou.

Meanwhile, the jilted quadroon had bribed a servant to steal a compromising letter in which the whole incestuous affair was outlined. She rushed to the courthouse with the letter and regretted it almost at once. A mob was soon marching on the Hoffman residence. A defiant Emmanuel, pistols in hand, was waiting on his front porch. He held the mob at bay for a few minutes and then without any warning turned one of the weapons on his own heart. His mother collapsed and died of shock moments after his death. The crowd dispersed. All of this takes place in the first two hundred and fifteen pages.

Durand made arrangements for Maria's care and that of her nieces and nephews. Maria innocently related the whole tragedy to Durand, who already had pieced most of it together. She offered the usual excuse of our author's guilty lovers, "Il m'aimait tant!"¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 241.

Georges Hoffman was in School in New York when the tragedy occurred. He was in love and wanted to take his prospective bride to meet his family. His future was ruined by the chance remarks of some officers he heard talking in a restaurant. They were reading aloud the newspaper version of the events we have described. When Georges heard the name Hoffman, he called the reader a liar and slapped his face. No sooner had he done this, when his fiance's brother entered and addressed him as Hoffman. The officer apologized and said the story was probably a fabrication, but he still wanted satisfaction for the slap. The terms of the duel were settled and Georges returned to his apartment where he found a letter from Durand. He assumed that it would confirm the newspaper story and his assumption was correct. He told his fiancée's brother to leave him. "Je suis maudit. Fuis-moi!"¹⁶ (The realization of being "maudit" is extensively treated in Dahlia.) The duel took place and Georges literally impaled himself on his reluctant adversary's sword. His last note showed that he was not too far in spirit from Chateaubriand's René.

Oh! miserable condition de notre humanité! qui fait
que le vieillard en cheveux blanc voit tomber autour
de lui les enfants qu'il aimait, ces beaux jeunes gens

¹⁶Ibid., p. 271.

devant lesquels la vie s'ouvrait si pleine d'avenir;
 et dire que ces coeurs usés, que ces corps courbés
 n'ont pas le droit d'offrir leurs jours flétris en
 échange de ces existences fleuries.¹⁷

Almost two years after this series of tragedies, Maria, ostracized by all, accepted the suit of M. Parsley who visited the Hoffman plantation on business. He sought her wealth, and she yearned to satisfy her frustrated maternity. The marriage was surprisingly happy even though they had no children.

An epilogue presents further developments. Louis Leduc, adopted by Durand, was now a young man. In spite of the care he had taken not to follow in his brother Paul's footsteps, he felt a strong attraction to Maria, now Mme Parsley. Parsley had to visit England on business and he offered Louis Leduc the job of managing his affairs in the meantime. Louis accepted the offer and it appeared that Maria was about to engage in another illicit relationship. Parsley's sudden death in England averted this impending affair. Louis married Maria and they left Louisiana to live in France. Two sets of lovers used this same expedient in Les Quarteronnes. In Gina and Dahlia we see the lovers flaunting the mores of their native region and settling in France.

"Claire," which followed "Frère et soeur" in composition,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 280.

was highly regarded by Madame de la Houssaye. After mailing it to Mr. Scribner, she wrote to Cable:

Ces messieurs [Charles Scribner's Sons] semblent bien disposés en ma faveur. Ils m'ont permis de leur envoyer "Claire," my pet work; et me promettent de le lire; c'est déjà beaucoup. "Claire" est une histoire Louisianaise dont plusieurs des acteurs vivent encore.¹⁸

The following statement from an article in L'Abeille appears to bear out the relative recency of the action:

"L'action de ce livre ne remonte pas à une époque bien reculée, puisque le drame se passe en 1856 et que plusieurs de ses personnages vivent encore."¹⁹

The manuscript of this novel is found in Volumes XIV, XV, and XVI of the de la Houssaye Collection. It numbers 390 pages, but an error in pagination (skipped pages) reduces the actual number to 367.

The action tends to be repetitious. It is essentially the story of a capricious woman's adultery and its effects on her family.

Clémence Laspy, orphaned at an early age, became the stepdaughter of André Dameron who died soon after marrying Clémence's mother. The young girl grew up with André's relatives who did not hesitate to express the displeasure they

¹⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

¹⁹L'Abeille (New Orleans), September 14, 1886.

took in raising her. A wealthy family visitor, Bernard de Sennerville,²⁰ fell in love with Clémence and married her despite the low esteem in which the Damerons held the girl. Clémence found that Bernard was wealthy, but austere in his living habits. Craving excitement, she had a brief affair with the libertine Hector Dameron, a relative of her late stepfather's family. After this affair ended, she became a faithful wife and had several children, of whom only Claire, the heroine, Bernard, and Blanche survived childhood.

When Clémence was thirty-three, another occasion presented itself. A Parisian born painter, Etienne Duffau, started a flirtation that soon developed beyond that stage. Etienne Duffau was soon to follow in the steps of Hector Dameron. Claire, Clémence's oldest child, was now about sixteen and quite observant. She saw Etienne on his way to her mother's room for his first assignation. Philippe Duffau, a houseguest of the elder Bernard and the uncle of Etienne, also saw Etienne enter Clémence's room. Philippe Duffau told the family he had seen a prowler. He gave enough information to make the lovers aware of his knowledge of their liaison.

Bernard, himself, overheard a woman talking to a man in

²⁰ This sounds like an adaptation of Centerville, a very small town about six miles east of Franklin.

the garden and learned that they were arranging a tryst. He could not identify the man, but he felt sure the woman was his wife. He gave orders the following night to his armed servants that the prowler was to be shot on sight. Claire noted the preparations and knew that Etienne and possibly her mother, too, would be killed. She went to her mother's room to warn her and found her in Etienne's arms. She explained the urgency of immediate action and the fact that Bernard would doubtlessly kill both of them if he found them in Clémence's room. Etienne took Claire's advice and followed her to her own room. Bernard found them there and told them to be prepared to marry the next day. Claire had already determined to make this sacrifice to save her mother's life. The marriage was hardest on Arthur Dameron, a nephew of Clémence's stepfather. Arthur loved Claire and everyone had assumed that they would marry. This young man was haunted by visions of an early death. He sometimes expressed the belief that he would be united to Claire only in death. Claire sought escape in travel. Hers seems to have been a typical case of "le mal de René":

Claire se sentait prise de ce besoin de mouvement qui agite toujours les malades et les affligés; ils croient laisser derrière eux la maladie et le chagrin, mais hélas! ils en sont suivis partout, et comme leur ombre les voient attachés à leurs pas.²¹

²¹Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XV, p. 352.

After several months of progressive deterioration of her health in Europe, Claire was brought home to die. Arthur, whose condition was comparable to Claire's, was told of her return: "Tant mieux ... nous reposerons sous le même ciel, peut-être dans le même cimetière."²² Claire died within two weeks of her return. Her husband, mindful of her sacrifice, thought that at least in death she belonged to Arthur. He returned to his native Paris. Arthur died only a few days after Claire. His final delirium seems to have been the pattern for the death of young Henri Saulve in Violetta. Henri had visions of a sorcière; Arthur saw a sainte in her glory:

Ses yeux etaient fixés sur le pied de son lit, comme s'il y apercevait quelque chose; une expression de tendresse ineffable, de bonheur se peignaient dans ses regards; il croisa les mains comme on le fait pour la prière, et s'écria d'une voix basse et tremblante d'émotion:

--C'est elle, c'est Claire. La voyez-vous debout au pied de mon lit? Mon Dieu! qu'elle est belle! Son front est couronné de l'aurole des saintes ... elle tient entre ses mains la palme du martyr ... elle me sourit ... elle m'appelle ... elle me montre le ciel ... Me voilà, ma bien-aimée ... me voilà.²³

Arthur was buried, then exhumed and reinterred next to Claire, where they will presumably lie for all eternity as inseparable as Tristan and Iseut. Bernard became hopelessly

²²Ibid., p. 358.

²³De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit. Vol. XVI, p. 382.

embittered. Clémence became dévoté just as Violetta would later do in the story of that name.

There are other similarities to the quadron stories besides those already noted. The "Amor vincit omnia" spirit that pervades Les Quarteronnes is very much in evidence in these earlier works just discussed. When Bernard wanted to allay the fears of Clémence before their marriage, he said: "Va l'amour est une puissance qui triomphe de tout."²⁴ Arthur had a Romantic's faith in fatalité, for Etienne's marriage to Claire had been foretold by a fortuneteller. When Claire lay dying, Arthur observed stoically: "Pauvre fille, elle avait oublié la fatalité."²⁵

The author injected herself into the work via asides and moralizing passages. Her evaluation of Clémence could well have been influenced by Augier's "nostalgie de la boue" in Le Mariage d'Olympe:

Non, heureusement, toutes les femmes ne ressemblent pas à Clémence de Sennerville. Quand la passion est son excuse, la femme tombée peut se lever. Si l'honneur, la vertu ne sont pas éteints en elle, elle ne commettra pas une seconde faute. Mais, si c'est l'attrait du vice qui l'a entraînée, elle ne s'arrêtera pas au premier pas,

²⁴De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XIV, p. 42.

²⁵De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XVI, p. 379.

elle marchera dans le sentier du mal jusqu'à ce qu'elle rencontre l'abîme qui doit l'engloutir.²⁶

There is one unusual note in this novel; Madame de la Houssaye gives one of her rare displays of ethnocentrism. For the first time she unfavorably stereotyped national groups. Clémence's inclinations were attributed to her Italian ancestry.

... fille d'Italie, elle était nonchalante et insoucieuse comme une Louisianaise. L'ambition, cette passion de l'Italie, l'alliait chez elle à une profonde dissimulation qui lui faisait prendre toutes les formes qu'il lui fallait pour séduire;²⁷ un profond dégoût du travail, une horreur invincible pour son humble position remplissaient l'âme de la jeune fille.²⁸

Clémence's adoptive parents had tried to dissuade Bernard from marrying her. " ... elle est d'une paresse excessive, et tu connais le proverbe mon ami;²⁹ fille d'un Italien, elle est romanesque comme tous ces gens-là."³⁰

²⁶De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XV, p. 287.

²⁷Influence of Stendhal on the author?

²⁸De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XIV, p. 16.

²⁹Presumably "Dolce far niente" quoted in the following pages.

³⁰De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XIV, p. 60.

CHAPTER VI

MISCELLANEOUS AND APOCRYPHAL WORKS

Short Stories

"Rose Blanche" was submitted to the 1890 concours of the Athénée Louisianais in the name of Gabrielle Tarlton, Madame de la Houssaye's granddaughter. We have already given our reasons for attributing this prize-winning story to the grandmother of the soi-disant author. The twenty-five page manuscript in our author's own hand is found in Volume II of the de la Houssaye Collection.

Willie Moreland left southwest Louisiana to make his fortune in Dallas. He stayed there two years and prospered. After a brief courtship he married Rose Blanche, a girl of delicate health. Informed that he was returning to his home, his parents assumed that he would be a burden, for they did not know that he had improved his financial position. All in his poor family, except his youngest sister, Katie, dreaded his return with Rose Blanche. Word came that Rose Blanche had become ill on the trip and that a stopover in Lafayette had become imperative. Six days later the family received a

telegram announcing the death of Rose Blanche. The members of Willie's family awaited him with mixed emotions, knowing that the joy of home-coming would be tempered by the recent tragedy. As the story ended, Katie observed that they were really sharing Willie's grief; they did not even know Rose Blanche.

"Le Fort de Keronec" (18 pages in Volume II of the de la Houssaye Collection) features a rather commonplace situation in the author's works. A son married beneath himself and was rejected by his wealthy Breton family. Michael Keronec started life as an ordinary fisherman, but soon amassed enough money to build the Fort de Keronec on the coast of Brittany where he finished his life in comfort.

"Le Doigt de Dieu" is a longer story. (The sixty-one page manuscript is in Volume XI of the de la Houssaye Collection.) We find the account of an Irish immigrant couple who settled in Nashville, Tennessee. Patrick Ferguson and Sarah O'Connor were not married, but they planned to marry when their fortunes improved. A daughter was born to them in Tennessee. Patrick studied law and made considerable progress. At the same time it was becoming apparent that he was tiring of Sarah and had no intention of marrying her. To get away from her, he took a case in the Attakapas country of Louisiana.

There he met a wealthy, but consumptive girl, whom he married. Meanwhile a former friend of his married Sarah in Tennessee. Patrick's wife and children all died of consumption. Sarah's husband died leaving her the illegitimate girl and a son born of their marriage. The girl was assumed to be legitimate. Sarah asked Patrick to care for the girl who was really his child. This he did, and later a brother of his married her.

The story that follows "Le Doigt de Dieu" is interesting in one respect. In "Sahretta la danseuse" (11 pages) we find a young Parisian couple with an illegitimate child. They seek asylum in Louisiana. It is the exact opposite of the situation in Les Quarteronnes in which the Louisiana lovers seek peace and anonymity in France.

A series of fifteen letters in Volume XI is called "Extraits des lettres d'un médecin." These ninety-four pages of letters purport to be the correspondence between a Dr. Louis Launay and his friend Alfred Berthould. Allusions to a character who figured in Les Quarteronnes (L'Abbé Moni) and to the racial prejudice in Louisiana suggest a date of composition approximately contemporaneous with Les Quarteronnes.

Louis Launay wrote to his friend Alfred Berthould to tell him the reason for his despondency. He had loved his cousin Thelsite. She rejected him, married another, and

entered the convent on her husband's death. After several months of correspondence, Louis began to show a more optimistic outlook. He finally found happiness in marriage to Mme Dartan, a widow, who had had an unhappy marriage. Mme Dartan considered the married woman to be the real pariah of society. Her husband had led her to this unusual conclusion. He had been unreasonably jealous and he also considered wives to be in the category of chattel.

In Volume XV there are two short stories that are similar in conception. "L'Oeuvre d'une jeune fille" (163 pages) is followed by "Louise" (52 pages) that could have been entitled "L'Oeuvre d'un jeune homme." "L'Oeuvre d'une jeune fille" was left unfinished, but there is enough of it for purposes of evaluation. It is basically a hysterical anti-American diatribe. Harriet Wilson, the jeune fille of the story, personified every vice known among the Americans; Creoles had no vices. She was a boarder at Mme Dulauren's pensionnat in Plaquemine across the river from Baton Rouge. As soon as Harriet Wilson is introduced, we are subjected to one of the most irrational outbursts ever to come from our author's pen:

Qu'y a-t-il de sacré pour ces jeunes filles habituées à une liberté entière? Leur a-t-on enseigné ce qu'elles devaient respecter? La religion? en ont-elles? La

plupart d'entres elles ne sont pas baptisées. L'amour, le respect filial? Mail l'Américaine va partout sans sa mère, on n'invite pas celle-ci aux soirées où court la fille et dont elle revient à minuit seule avec un étranger. L'amitié? Elle prodigue trop ce mot pour jamais le comprendre. L'amour? Elle a remplacé ce doux sentiment par l'épouvantable flirtation. Et maintenant, jetez l'une de nos jeunes filles créoles, si pieuses, si innocentes, si aimantes, parmi cette société américaine. Qu'en resultera-t-il? Ou l'enfant perdra une à une toutes ses pures croyances, ou elle tombera accablée sous les coups qui lui briseront le coeur en cherchant à briser ses sentiments.¹

Harriet Wilson fitted the pattern. She flirted outrageously, caused engagements to be broken, and actually drove one young man to suicide. Her morals were akin to those of the quadroons in our author's stories: "Menteuse, envieuse, curieuse, lascive, insolente, haineuse, elle n'a pas une seule qualité pour faire oublier cette horrible réunion des vices."²

In the early pages of the story there is a statement by Mme Dulaurens who was thinking of closing her pensionnat because of poor health. While Madame de la Houssaye did not have a pensionnat, she did have a private day school. One wonders how much the author projected her own feelings by way of Mme Dulaurens:

... quel bonheur d'être libre, de ne plus être l'esclave

¹Sidonie de la Houssaye, "L'Oeuvre d'une jeune fille," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XII, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 158.

d'un public insolent, de ne plus être entourée
d'étrangers devant lesquels il faut cacher ses
sentiments, dissimuler ses regards et ses paroles.³

Just twenty miles south of Plaquemine is Donaldsonville, the setting of "Louise." The townspeople of the 1880's wondered why Paul Hervey, the wealthy son of a prominent New Orleans family, was burying himself in that dreary little town. Paul Hervey began to court Dr. Martin's daughter Louise. This caused even more interest in the young man. A friend of the Martin family made a few inquiries in New Orleans and found that Paul was a spendthrift débauché who had dissipated the inheritance from his mother's estate. His father had sent him to Donaldsonville in the hope that he would improve away from the temptations of a large city.

As soon as the Martins learned of Paul's background, they rejected him as a suitor. He then concentrated his efforts on Irma Deblieux. In time the latter recognized Paul's true character, and threw away the ring he had given her. Paul nonchalantly picked it up and moved on to other adventures.

"Mardi Gras" is a thirty-nine page short story in Volume XVIII of the author's collection. On Mardi Gras day in 1873, Cliff Gordon masked as an Indian. As he stood near the

³Ibid., p. 14.

intersection of Canal and Royal streets, a girl, also dressed as an Indian, greeted him as she passed. He met her again that night at the ball of Comus. They exchanged gifts (his gift being a ring) and promised to meet the following year, and she left before the traditional unmasking at midnight. The following year she did not keep her appointment. Cliff later fell in love with a girl named May Tracy. He told her of the Mardi Gras incident, but became quite distressed when May asked if he still loved the "Indian." She spared him too much embarrassment by removing her glove to display the ring he had given to the "Indian."

Patent Medicine Stories

Probably the least attractive of Madame de la Houssaye's short stories were those written for "les medicine men," as she called them. She wrote at least six stories extolling the virtues of patent medicines.

In Volume VI of the de la Houssaye Collection, there is a thirty-three page short story called "Rough on Pain." The hero of the story was a young man from a town a few miles west of Franklin. Adrien Deblieir aspired to be a doctor. He studied the use of simples by Negroes and Indians. He eventually learned of Dr. Wells' remarkable product, "Rough on Pain." Using this panacea, he treated, cured, and married a

wealthy young lady whose case the doctors had declared hopeless.

"Chattanooga," a one hundred and seventy-five page story, follows "Rough on Pain." This story was obviously written expressly for the "Black Draught" company in Chattanooga. Notwithstanding this patent intention, the author tried to foist it upon Cable as a literary gem left by her grandmother. She sent a copy of the manuscript and an English translation to the patent medicine company. When Cable expressed interest in the account of her grandmother's second trip,⁴ she realized that she had made a mistake in sending it to the "medicine men" who showed no interest and, in fact, later rejected the manuscript and translation. She tried to extricate herself from this position. Speaking of "Chattanooga," she wrote:

C'est un petit chef-d'oeuvre! ma grand'mère s'est surpassée. Tout le monde pense comme moi et pense que j'ai été assez folle pour envoyer un tel ouvrage au "Black Draught." Il est en ce moment à Chattanooga, mais j'ai l'espoir que ces medicine men me le renverront, je leur ai demandé un gros prix qui les effraiera peut-être ... L'idée de voir un ouvrage semblable envelopper des bouteilles de medicines patentées! Cela me rend frénétique ... J'ai envie de me battre.⁵

⁴He had already bought the account of her grandmother's 1795 trip to the Attakapas country.

⁵Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 12, 1885.

Her protestations are not very convincing. In the very same letter she admitted that she was writing expressly for the "medicine men: "Ensuite il me faut ... de temps à autre écrire quelque chose pour les medicines--j'en suis bien dégoûtée et voudrais écrire pour les messieurs Scribner seuls."⁶

"Chattanooga" tells the story of the 1807 trip to Chattanooga by the author's grandparents. Her grandfather was cured of cancer of the stomach by Indians using the formula later bought by the Black Draught company. In addition to the description of the grandparents' travels and the grandfather's cure, there is the story of a doctor trying to steal the secret of the Black Draught formula. He and his Indian lover were presumed killed in an explosion that destroyed a cave used by them for their trysts.

The story abounds in anachronisms and absurdities. Had the truth been known, it would hardly have served its intended purpose. According to the story, M. Pain, the author's grandfather, returned completely cured to St. John the Baptist Parish in September, 1807.⁷ Actually M. Pain died in March, 1808--hardly a testimonial for the "Black Draught" company.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Chattanooga," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. VI, p. 208.

"Black Draught" is a sixty-five page sequel to "Chattanooga." It is found in Volume XVII of the author's collection. A friend of the 1807 travelers visited the grandmother in 1835⁸ and brought her up to date on the events at Chattanooga since 1807. We learn that the doctor and his Indian friend had escaped death and that Chattanooga had become a thriving community thanks to the remarkable therapeutic powers of "Black Draught."

Following "Black Draught" is a forty-five page testimonial to (). The author was prepared to sell this nameless story to any patent medicine firm--the company had only to insert its name in the ()'s! In the following summaries parentheses will be used where needed in imitation of the author's technique.

Victor, a young New Orleans pharmacist, was understandably skeptical about patent medicines with extravagant claims. One product (), seemed different and worthwhile. It cured his sister's consumption and it was only natural that he should take a supply of this product to Franklin where he accepted a temporary position. In Franklin he met Lucile Smith, a consumptive like his own sister. Thanks to () he cured her.

⁸She died in 1828.

They were later married. Victor was extolling () as the story ended:

... lorsque je regarde ma soeur, lorsque mes yeux caressent le doux visage de ma petite femme, je ne puis me cacher que c'est au () que je dois le bonheur d'avoir près de moi ces deux créatures adorées, qu'il vient de sauver la vie de ma femme comme autrefois il a sauvé celle de ma soeur.⁹

"Rose ou le malade inattendu" follows. The setting is Morgan City, about twenty miles east of Franklin. "Rose" is a longer story (130 pages) with a large cast of characters. The story is essentially that of Rose, granddaughter of Dr. Blake, and of Allain, a child left in the doctor's care. Allain was thought to be retarded, but even he was gifted in this remarkable story: "Comme je l'ai dit, le jeune idiot était d'une adresse extraordinaire ..." ¹⁰ Thanks to (), ¹¹ he recovered the use of his faculties. His case was really amnesia, not retardation. He married the doctor's daughter.

Tinker listed "Don Ramon de Mendez" as another patent medicine story by Mme de la Houssaye, but he gave no information

⁹Sidonie de la Houssaye, "()," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XVII, p. 108.

¹⁰Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Rose ou le malade inattendu," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XVII, p. 142.

¹¹The name of the product, as in the preceding story, was to be supplied by the buyer.

on it, and it is not mentioned elsewhere.¹²

In an April 11, 1887, letter to Cable, our author mentioned the sale of "La Dame au masque noir" to Le Franco-Louisianais in New Orleans. In the rare issues of this shortlived newspaper of the 1880's, we can find only one installment of this work.¹³ The heroine, Isabelle, was sick for seven years. The nature of her illness was not specified, but she did wear a mask to cover a disfigurement considered only temporary. She sought relief and a cure in the waters of a small Texas lake. It is not unlikely that this story was originally written to be sold to some individual or group owning such a resort.

There is no record that any of these six patent medicine stories was sold. "La Dame au masque noir" was sold, but its use en feuilleton would seem to eliminate it from the patent medicine category.

Translations

Madame de la Houssaye translated no less than ten American works, including three novels. These works, ranging from three to three hundred and thirty-seven pages, are all

¹²Tinker, op. cit., p. 113.

¹³Le Franco-Louisianais (New Orleans), May 14, 1887.

devoid of literary interest. Were it not for listings such as the Catalog of the Library of Congress, their titles would be unknown today. Who recalls May Carleton (pseudonym of May Agnes Fleming), Margaret Blount, Virginia de Forrest, or Bertha Clay (pseudonym of Charlotte Brame)?

An earlier commentator professed to being puzzled about these works, but she later answered the question she had posed. Referring to the translations as a whole, she said:

That her idea in translating them was to sell them as translations to the French newspapers of New Orleans is doubtful. There are no records or any statements of the members of her family that would indicate such was her purpose.¹⁴

The reticence of her family to discuss certain aspects of her career is understandable. Miss Savoie noted that she not only translated a work for a New Orleans French newspaper, but that she actually palmed it off as an original work.¹⁵

Le Mari de Marguerite, which ran from August 26, 1883 to December 16, 1883 in L'Abeille, has no statement to the effect that it is a translation, yet in the manuscript it is entitled "Sybille. Episode de la guerre de la dernière révolution.

¹⁴Savoie, op. cit., p. 128.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 133.

Traduit de l'anglais de May Agnes Fleming."¹⁶

It was also suggested that these translations were intended for use in the author's school.¹⁷ The fact that they are simple stories of love and adventure without literary or didactic merit would seem to exclude that purpose.

Why did she translate these stories? We must assume that it was for money. She alluded to the practice of translating American novels when she was offering her services as a translator to Cable. " ... j'ai traduit plusieurs romans américains pour la presse française."¹⁸ It is not clear whether she signed these works as translator or author. We do not know the names of any of them. In an April 9, 1888 letter, she said she had sold L'Arche de Noé to Le Petit Courrier des Dames in Paris. The work was not described beyond the explanation that the title referred to the name of a plantation.¹⁹ It could conceivably have been a translation.

It is unfortunate that the originals of these stories

¹⁶De la Houssaye, "Sybille," MS, loc. cit., Vol. XIX, p. 1.

¹⁷Savoie, op. cit., p. 125.

¹⁸Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, July 19, 1884.

¹⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, April 9, 1888.

are not available for purposes of comparison. In view of this circumstance, we have no valid basis for commenting on her work as a translator.

Even though we do not have May Agnes Fleming's model for Sybille which became "Le Mari de Marguerite," the novel deserves mention as the author's first published work.

Marguerite McVane was a spoiled Virginia girl raised by her grandfather. It was assumed that she would marry her cousin Jerome McVane. She frankly opposed the project and told her cousin that she would never marry a person as unattractive as he.

On the train to Boston to visit friends, she had an accident. She was taken to a farm near that city, as it was the home of a nurse, Mrs. Gray. She spent several months recuperating. The good looks of young William Gray and the unusual circumstances of their meeting captured the imagination of the romanesque girl. They were secretly married. She visited her friends in Boston and returned to Virginia where plans for her marriage to her cousin were almost complete. A few days before the wedding was to take place she wrote a letter explaining her action and left in the middle of the night.

Her grandfather was disconsolate. Jerome McVane was

hurt, but he reasoned that his capricious cousin would soon tire of her roturier husband and return to Virginia. She did, in fact, quickly become disillusioned with the monotony of farm life as a member of the family. Marguerite also realized that her husband was barely literate. Coldness turned to overt hostility and she decided to go home, a move that he did not oppose. William Gray never complained, but he, too, soon left home to try his fortune on the west coast. Soon after their separation, Marguerite saw his name in the list of missing in the sinking of a passenger boat. Stricken with remorse, she rejected her cousin's proposal and promised to remain faithful to the memory of the man whom she had wronged. She took a job as a tutor in New York.

At a party, years later, she noticed a bearded stranger who bore an uncanny resemblance to William Gray, but the stranger was educated and wealthy. He introduced himself as a friend of Marguerite's grandfather, who had died during the Civil War. Later, however, he declared that he was William Gray. He had miraculously survived the shipwreck and had made a fortune and acquired an education in the intervening years. At first he showed only scorn for Marguerite. Under his mother's influence, he gradually put aside his bitter feelings. Finally William and Marguerite started life anew on her grandfather's

plantation which he had bought as a surprise for her.

The author, May Agnes Fleming, was quite popular. In a list compiled with the aid of wholesalers' figures for the years 1882-1887, she was fifth in popularity.²⁰ Posterity has somewhat revised the popular choice of that period. In a list of twenty leading writers of prose fiction, Edward P. Roe was first, Mary J. Holmes second, William D. Howells eighteenth, and Henry James twentieth.²¹

The other authors and their works will be listed in an appendix. A March 29, 1887 letter to Cable contains a reference to Bertha Clay's Beyond Pardon as being translated. This translation, however, is not in the de la Houssaye Manuscript Collection.

Closely related to her translations is an adaptation of a French translation of Schiller's Don Carlos. In this case we are fortunate to have the original version. Under the heading "Traduction de Schiller," she did a partial revision of seven of the nine scenes in Act I of Don Carlos. She was

²⁰The Literature of the American People, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), p. 591.

²¹Ibid.

ostensibly "simplifying" the work of M. X. Marmier.²² A marginal note²³ indicates that she may have consulted another translation.²⁴ The reasons for undertaking as well as abandoning this revision are not known. Her attempt to polish the work of an accomplished translator was unfortunate, for her prolix style was ill-suited to the faster pace of drama. A comparison of her revision and Marmier's translation of a dramatic scene is enlightening. The scene chosen for this purpose is the second scene of Act I. Don Carlos, son of Philip II, is in conference with his life-long friend Rodrigue, Marquis of Posa. Carlos recalled a favor done for Rodrigue when they were children and asked that Rodrigue now repay the favor. Rodrigue promised to comply. Carlos then confided the secret that was torturing him. His step-mother, Elizabeth de Valois, was to have been his bride, but his father claimed her for himself. Carlos still loved her. This was the secret he had to confide to a friend.

²²Schiller: Théâtre, trans. M. X. Marmier (3 vols.; 6th ed.; Paris: Charpentier et Cie, 1873).

²³"Oeuvres dramatiques de Schiller de M. de Barante, 1835," Vol. XX, p. 1. This note actually appears over the title of "Un Roman a Franklin" published as Charles et Ella.

²⁴Schiller: Oeuvres dramatiques, trans. M. De Barante (6 vols.; Paris: Dufey, 1835).

Le Marquis lui présentant la main. Je le ferai, Carlos. Ce serment d'enfant, l'homme à présent renouvelle. Je m'acquitterai; mon heure est peut-être venue.

Carlos. Maintenant, maintenant. Oh! ne retarde plus. Maintenant elle est venue. Le temps est arrivé où tu peux t'acquitter. J'ai besoin d'affection. Un horrible secret dévore mon coeur; il faut, il faut qu'il en sorte. Sur ton visage pâle, je veux lire mon arrêt de mort. Ecoute ..., frémis ..., mais ne réponds rien ... J'aime ma mère!²⁵

Madame de la Houssaye's adaptation follows:

Le Marquis solennellement. Et je le ferai don Carlos! Ce serment d'enfant, l'homme le renouvelle aujourd'hui! Un jour peut-être, il me sera permis de m'acquitter.

Carlos. Oh! ne retarde plus, don Rodrigue, l'heure est venue! penses-tu que ce soit seulement de vains souvenirs que j'ai cherché à évoquer! Non! j'ai voulu avec ces pensées de l'enfance remuer tous les fibres de ton coeur, j'ai voulu en rappelant le serment savoir si tu étais prêt à l'acquitter. J'ai besoin d'affection. Un horrible secret dévore mon coeur, il faut qu'il en sorte à tout prix ... regarde-moi bien; dans ton visage pâle, je veux lire mon arrêt de mort ... Ecoute ... oh! ces horribles paroles pourront-elles jamais s'échapper de mes lèvres! ... J'aime, Rodrigue. Et sais-tu qui j'aime? La reine d'Espagne! La femme de mon père! Celle qu'il me faut appeler ma mère!

The climatic "J'aime ma mère!" in the Marmier version suffers particularly by Madame de la Houssaye's feuilletoniste technique. The fervent avowal is prolonged almost to the point of ruining all dramatic effect. Our author missed "le mot juste" completely. She needed two appositive phrases and

²⁵Marmier, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 8.

one clause to express what was already expressed in the two words "ma mère."

Childrens' Stories

She achieved happier results in childrens' stories and devoted Volume XXI exclusively to them. Her stories were always entertaining, but each one usually had a message for the young readers. They are told with so much apparent enthusiasm that it is hard to understand the author's professed distaste for this genre: "Je suis tres occupée pour le moment. Une maison d'éducation (un couvent) m'ordonne quelques histoires d'enfants. Cela m'ennuie à mourir d'écrire de semblables choses--mais les enfants demandent leur pain ..."²⁶

Unfortunately, investigation failed to yield any stories written for convents.

Especially entertaining and instructive among the childrens' stories is Volume III of the author's collection. It is the "Mythologie des petits enfants." This work strikes the reader as an abridged (128 page) Bulfinch written for children. The author considers, unlike Bulfinch, only Greek and Roman mythology and she does add explanatory remarks to

²⁶Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1886.

point up the differences between the old myths and the tenets of the grandchildren's Christian religion. Her closing admonition to the children proves that she at least knew the principles of classicism:

"... ma petite Mythologie est complète. Puisse-t-elle vous amuser en vous instruisant."²⁷

A seven page story entitled "Une paire de gants" is a bit of innocent plagiarism, if the practice can ever be called innocent. The similarity to Edgar Grima's humorous poem "Pour un nickel" is too marked to be accidental.²⁸ In Grima's poem a young man watched attentively as an attractive young lady boarded the same street car. She soon became embarrassed when she realized she had no money. The young man generously offered to pay her fare. He, too, became embarrassed when he found that he had no more money. He was about to declare his own lack of money, when he recalled the nickel mounted as a watch fob that he carried as a good luck charm. He detached the nickel and paid her fare. It was a good investment, as he later married the young lady.

²⁷ Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Mythologie des petits enfants," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. III, p. 128.

²⁸ Edgar Grima, "Pour un nickel," Comptes Rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais, Livraison 3^e, 3^e série, tome 2 (Novembre, 1889), pp. 416-18.

In our author's prose version, a young lady rescued a man from a similar position. She paid his fare, but in the search for a nickel she dropped her gloves. He picked them up. Later he met her at a party and mentioned having her gloves. This led to another meeting and their marriage. They jokingly referred to their child as "cinq sous."²⁹

Unfinished Stories

Two stories that figured prominently in the correspondence with Cable were left unfinished. The one hundred and forty-four page manuscript of "Les Redoutables" is found in Volume XIX of the manuscript collection. The work was to be the history of a secret society in St. Mary Parish, but little of this plan was accomplished. Most of the work simply parallels the "Voyage de me grand'mère" and the "Alix de Morainville" story sold to Cable and incorporated into his Strange True Stories of Louisiana. In "Les Redoutables" the author skipped from the year 1795, the date of the "Voyage de ma grand'mère" and the "Alix de Morainville" story, to the year 1841. She started to identify the members of this secret society as descendants of the 1795 travelers, but she never progressed

²⁹Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Une Paire de gants," MS, loc. cit., Vol. II, pp. 154-56.

beyond the vaguest of descriptions.

"Georges Gérard" was undertaken in 1884 as a new preface to "Les Redoutables," when Cable informed our author that she could not include in "Les Redoutables" the stories she had already sold to him, even if she changed the names of the characters. There are over a hundred empty pages following the one hundred and twenty-seven page manuscript in Volume IV of the author's collection. Knowing that she did not waste paper, we may assume that she intended eventually to finish the story. "Georges Gérard" contains a highly romantic and inaccurate history of the early days of St. Martinville. There is also mention of the "white slaves" in the earlier part of the century. These were Germans known as "redemptioners" who received passage to America for a specified period of bound service. When their contract was violated, they became literally "white slaves." Cable popularized the plight of these people in "Salome Müller, the White Slave" found in Strange True Stories of Louisiana.

Apocrypha

Volume V of the de la Houssaye Collection appears to be, with one or two exceptions, copy work or practice work. The absence of corrections, of rewriting and of other signs of original composition is striking. Six of the ten items

are dated. The nonsequential order indicates an eclectic rather than a purely chronological order. This is best grasped by reviewing the contents of Volume V. The day of the week was not indicated by Mme de la Houssaye. This information came from a perpetual calendar, and was obtained in an effort to discover whether there was a discernible time pattern involved.

Contents of Volume V of the de la Houssaye Collection

Une Mère (94 pages)	Undated
Souvenir du 18 octobre 1838 (2 pages)	October 19, 1838 (Friday)
La Mère et le lys (allégorie) (2 pages)	October 5, 1856 (Friday)
Une Idée (2 pages)	September 12, 1838 (Wednesday)
Discours prononcé par un jeune homme contre deux jeunes gens qui soutenaient que l'infidélité ajoutait au bonheur (2 pages)	January 6, 1839 (Sunday)
La Fauvette et le poète (allégorie) (5 pages)	Undated
L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours (4 pages)	June 10, 1857 (Wednesday)
Une Histoire d'amour qui commence un conte de fée (2 pages)	Undated
Calembourg monstre (5 pages)	July 14, 1840 (Friday)
Souvenir d'un sofa (72 pages)	Undated
L'Enfant des prairies (104 pages)	Undated

"La Fauvette et le poète" and "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours" comprised the author's prize-winning entry in the 1889 Concours of L'Athénée Louisianais. With the exception of these two, whose authenticity we have already challenged, not one of the works in the preceding list was ever attributed to Mme de la Houssaye. She never mentioned any of these works in her correspondence.

These selections seem to have been culled from newspapers or periodicals. We can find much support for this view in the works, themselves.

The fact that three works bear a Wednesday date and two a Friday date suggests a periodical. Moreover, the September 12, 1838 entry entitled "Une Idée" mentions the Franklin Republican which appeared on Wednesdays. September 12, 1838 was a Wednesday.

Another work in the same category, but not in the same volume, should be mentioned. In Volume XVIII there is an entry entitled simply "Ecrit pour le Moniteur de Franklin" and dated December 4, 1857. There was never a Moniteur at Franklin, but there was a Moniteur des Attakapas printed at St. Martinville. The only mention of this paper Professor Tinker found was an allusion to it in another newspaper of

1858.³⁰ To date no copies of this journal have been found.

The article designated as being written for Le Moniteur is stylistically incompatible with Madame de la Houssaye's work. It is far too terse and masculine to be hers. In fact, the writer said, "Avant de commencer, lecteur, je vous donne ma parole de gentleman, que tout ce que je vais vous dire ici est vrai."³¹ The article claims to be a reply to an article on flirtation by a Louise R. This presumably anonymous writer wanted to warn his readers of the dangers of flirtation.

Ce que je désire, c'est que mon récit puisse servir de leçon à ces belles jeunes filles avides de louanges et de conquêtes et à ces pauvres fous qui viennent étourdiment se brûler au feu de leurs prunelles, comme font les papillons aux lumières.³²

Sophie R., a girl who may have served as the pattern for Harriet Wilson in "L'Oeuvre d'une jeune fille," was a coquette who left behind her a trail of disillusioned young men. Henri was one of her admirers who could not accept her for what she was. When he was discarded for another "fou," he contemplated suicide and would have carried out this act, had his

³⁰Edward L. Tinker, Bibliography of the French Newspapers and Periodicals of Louisiana (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1933), p. 105.

³¹Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Ecrit pour le Moniteur," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XVIII, p. 1.

³²Ibid.

mother not dissuaded him. The writer's comment on Sophie R. and Henri showed a masculine succinctness and detachment of which our author was incapable when there was a lesson to teach. "Tant que le monde sera monde, on rencontrera des coquettes comme Sophie et des fous comme Henri."³³

In addition to the dating, the stories in Volume V, which we temporarily put aside to insert an entry from Volume XVIII, are generally of periodical length, i.e., quite brief. Five of them are only two pages long; one has four pages, and two are five pages in length. The remaining stories are longer.

Two of the stories, "La Mère et le lys" and "La Fauvette et le poète" are allegories. The only other allegory in our author's collection is "La Mariole" identified as "Traduit de l'anglais d'une gazette de Chicago. Le 6 janvier 1864."³⁴ "La Mère et le lys" is the brief (2 page) story of a woman wearing a beautiful lily over her heart. It excited the desire of many people. For various reasons she would not give it to a young man, a savant, a seigneur, or even a gardener. Each had an improper motive for wanting the lily. The lily would only change hands when a person with a proper

³³Ibid., p. 10.

³⁴Sidonie de la Houssaye, "La Mariole," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XVIII, p. 1.

intention presented himself. "La Fauvette et le poète" tells a comparable story, but one with a definite ending. In this five page story the warbler rejects all would-be owners until he finds a poet. "La Mariole," the allegory in Volume XVIII, deals with the Civil War. The national leaders emerge as characters resembling those in La Fontaine or Le Roman de Renart.

Another reason to doubt that Mme de la Houssaye wrote the stories in Volume V, with the exception of one, is the irreconcilable philosophy found in them. "Une Mère," a play in three acts,³⁵ and the idyllic "Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours" are diametrically opposed in spirit. "Une Mère" is the story of Alfred de Norlis' love for Claire Lividgi. There are several obstacles in their path. Claire, who lived in a Parisian pensionnat, was afraid to tell her mother of her love for Alfred. Her mother, a mysterious character, was supposed to live in Lyon, but she was occasionally seen in Paris. She did not oppose the match, when she learned of Claire's love. Alfred objected, however, when he recognized her as the former mistress of his late uncle.

³⁵The only play in our author's works, with the exception of the excerpt from a French translation of Schiller's Don Carlos. No play was ever mentioned in her correspondence.

Claire's mother had become the mistress of Alfred's uncle after her husband died leaving her with the infant Claire. Alfred believed that his father would disown him if he married the daughter of such a woman. He suggested that Mme Lividgi go away and send back word that Claire's mother had died. She thought that this was too great a sacrifice and selfishly tried to prejudice her daughter against Alfred. When she realized that the two would be miserable unless married, she relented. Her generosity on this occasion was later repaid and she was allowed to live near her daughter.

A typical expression of the play's theme occurs in the first scene of Act I. Claire is expressing fear that her mother may oppose her match with Alfred. Her Aunt Louise believes that Claire's mother will approve, but if she opposes the match, Claire should remember that a mother's love means more than a husband's love ever will.

Louise. Une mère, vois-tu, est une fée toute puissante, sa baguette magique c'est son amour--mais pourtant si quelqu'incident que je ne puis prévoir s'élevait entre Alfred et toi, si quelque'obstacle plus fort que la tendresse maternelle empêchait ta mère d'approuver cette union, eh bien! il faudrait te résigner Claire.

Claire. Renoncer à Alfred! Oh! jamais, jamais!

Louise. Calme-toi, mon amie, nous n'en sommes pas là heureusement. Mais si cela venait à arriver, je te le répète, il faudrait te résigner! car quel homme pourrait te donner en amour une parcelle de ce feu

divin qui remplit le coeur d'une mère.³⁶

"L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours,"

one of the prize-winning works, is a four page selection in lyric prose with a pastoral setting. By the banks of a stream, a girl of sixteen bemoans the loss of her family. She is about to abandon all hope when a young man appears with these words of consolation:

Oh! oui, crois-moi enfant, l'amour de l'époux renferme en lui seul tous les amours: il est grave, recueilli, absolu comme celui du père; il est dévoué, caressant comme celui de la mère, et comme celui du frère, il est gai, folâtre, plein de confiance et de tendresse ineffable! Essuie tes yeux; je te le répète, tout ce que tu as perdu, mon amour peut te le rendre, et plus encore même! Viens, suis-moi, dans la maison de ton époux t'attend le bonheur.³⁷

It is hard to concede that "Une Mère" and "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours" are from the pen of the same author.

Objections could likewise be raised against the other works. In the "Souvenir du 18 octobre 1838" there is a young lady who recalls the events of the preceding night's ball.

³⁶Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Une Mère," MA, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. V, pp. 5-6.

³⁷Sidonie de la Houssaye, "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. V, p. 4.

The whole tone is that of the line "Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé," in Lamartine's "L'Isolement." Her beloved was not at the ball and she experienced little joy in the festivities:

Et puis parfois un souvenir venait comme un reproche se glisser dans mon âme: ces voix qui murmuraient à mon oreille des mots tendres et galants, ce n'étaient pas la sienne, ces yeux qui me suivaient, ce n'étaient pas les siens, enfin, il n'était pas là.³⁸

In the "Discours prononcé par un jeune homme contre deux jeunes gens qui soutenaient que l'infidélité ajoutait au bonheur" we find in addition to the expected defense of constancy in love a strain of Platonism found nowhere else in Madame de la Houssaye's authentically original works.

... je le dis ici, l'inconstance est une profanation de l'amour, de ce sentiment qui nous rapproche de la divinité et qui seul nous procure ici-bas les jouissances du paradis.³⁹

The last two works in Volume V are seventy-two and one hundred and four pages long respectively. The first, "Souvenir d'un sofa," appears to be our author's expansion

³⁸ Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Souvenir du 18 octobre 1838," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. V, p. 2.

³⁹ Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Discours prononcé par un jeune homme contre deux jeunes gens qui soutenaient que l'infidélité ajoutait au bonheur," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. V, p. 1.

of the theme in "Une Histoire d'amour qui commence comme un conte de fée." In the latter work parental opposition to a match is the problem of the young people. The girl is poor and the boy's parents object. He acquiesces in their decision. She was told that he had hereditary consumption, but she would have overlooked this for his happiness. We are asked to compare the love of both. In "Souvenir d'un sofa" almost the same problems are solved to everyone's satisfaction. In this case parental opposition ceased, when it was learned that consumption was not in fact hereditary in the boy's family.

"Calembourg monstre" is a travel story of a lion hunt that was reworked to include puns on the names of citizens in the Attakapas region. It is understandably poor. The fact that the name de la Houssaye does not appear suggests that our author copied the work. Her maiden name (Perret) was included by the unknown author.

"L'Enfant des prairies" tells of a child captured and raised by Indians. She was ultimately restored to her family. This work is probably a translation.

With the excerpt from Le Moniteur in Volume XVIII, these works suggest classification as nonoriginal compositions of Madame de la Houssaye. The fact that two of them were published under her name does not establish their

authenticity. It will be recalled that her first published work, Le Mari de Marguerite, was the translation of an American novel that she submitted as an original work. It is also known that she had two large albums in which she and her family and friends copied over seventy-five of their favorite poems.⁴⁰ It is not unreasonable to assume that she similarly copied prose as a stylistic exercise.

⁴⁰Savoie, op. cit., p. 175.

CHAPTER VII

STYLE

That Sidonie de la Houssaye had an easy flow of language there is no doubt. How else could one account for over five thousand pages of manuscript that dates from roughly 1883 to 1890?¹ It should be recalled that there may be an equal quantity of missing works. Who knows the number of American works that she translated and sent to France? How many non-extant works appeared under the pseudonym of Louise Raymond? Did she sell any patent medicine stories of which we have no record?

These questions remain unanswered, but we can give some indication of what is known to be lost. The manuscripts of the published works Amis et fortune and "La Dame au masque noir" are lost. The autobiographical "Une Page de ma vie" is lost, as is the patent medicine story "Don Ramon de Mendez." "L'Arche de Noé," reputedly sold to a Parisian magazine, no

¹The author said that she had started "Les Redoutables" in 1874. This is the only original work that could be placed outside the limits suggested.

longer exists in manuscript form. The translation of Bertha Clay's Beyond Pardon is lost. All English translations of the author's own works are lost.

The extant works are as remarkable for their range as they are for their sheer bulk--twenty-one books in manuscript. One finds childrens' stories, conventional tales of romantic love and adventure, and novels tinged with naturalism. Her command of conventional French prose is taken for granted. What is striking to the student of language is her command of two dialects proper to Louisiana. Many have rivaled her in the use of the Negro patois; none has approached her in the literary use of the Acadian idiom. Two examples will demonstrate her facility in handling dialects.

In Gina there is a song called "In grand bataille."² Pa Jean, the old Negro gardener, sang it with appropriate gestures. Two stanzas of this four stanza song are sufficient to give its flavor:

Mo va dit vous in grand bataille,
Ça qui rivé, longtemps, longtemps:
Missié di vent, mamzelle do l'eau

²The song is not found in the text of Gina, but in a group of songs preceding it. (Vide, Vol. VII, pp. 201-204). It is known that the song was to appear in an appendix to Gina. We assume that such was the case. There is no printed copy of Gina that contains the last chapters and the appendix.

Zé té fachés l'aine après l'aute.
 Di vent li fait Pouf! Pouf! Pouf! Pouf!
 Do l'eau chanté: Oua! Oua! Oua! Oua!
 Et pis zé battent ... Di vent soufflé ...
 Do l'eau lévé ... En l'air! en l'air!

Di vent cassé les la maisons,
 Jété en bas tous nous barrières.
 Do l'eau vini droite d'arrière li,
 Pou habiller ti brin encore,
 Aster di vent liassin di fé ...
 Li té fretté, pove vié n'homme là!
 Do l'eau craché en haut di fé,
 Et tegin li dans ti moment.³

"Georges Gérard," started in 1884 as a new preface to "Les Redoutables," is the only other work containing Negro patois songs. There are three songs sung by a Negro boatman on a trip to St. Martinville. These songs, unlike "In grand bataille," are incorporated in the text and are unnamed. The first is a hunting song vaguely reminiscent of the "Bamboula" that our author sent to Cable. "Bamboula" was sent in standard French. It will be recalled that Cable translated it and created a problem with the title to add appeal.⁴ The first five lines of the song in "Georges Gerard" are offered for comparison.

Mo gaignin li! mo gaignin li!
 Pitit chat-oué, mo gaignin toi!
 Oui bon gombo mo va mangé

³Ibid.

⁴Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," loc. cit., p. 823.

Avec vaillant ti chat-oué là!
La, la, la, la, la, la ...⁵

The song following this one sounds like the work of a French-speaking Joel Chandler Harris. Two stock characters of the animal stories in Negro patois come to their expected end. "Misié Lapin" and "Misié Bouqui," two notorious thieves, are killed by the white man who hunts them with his dogs. The "Bouqui" (hyena) seems out of place in Louisiana folklore, but Professor Fortier stated that it was commonly used as a symbol of the dupe.⁶

The last song in this group praises the beauty of "Mamzelle Zozo" and indicates the singer's eagerness to work hard to build the fine cabin she deserves.⁷

Perhaps the finest example of Madame de la Houssaye's command of the Acadian dialect is found in a humorous scene in Pouponne et Balthazar. Placide Bossier, brother of the author's great-grandfather, provoked the anger of an Acadian neighbor, Mme Térencine Simoneau, for the benefit of his

⁵Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Georges Gérard," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. IV, p. 40.

⁶Alcée Fortier, Louisiana Folk-Tales (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 94.

⁷De la Houssaye, "Georges Gérard," loc. cit., p. 43.

very proper sister-in-law. Placide started the scene by pretending to be interested in buying eggs.

Placide qui voulait amuser Charlotte [sa belle-soeur], s'arrêta.

--Combien vos oeufs? demanda-t-il.

Elle hésita avant de répondre, la colère lui montait au cerveau, mais la présence de mon aïeule la retenait.

--Trois picaillons [about 19¢], répondit-elle d'un ton bourru.

--C'est trop cher, dit-il.

Il essayait de la faire parler et ne réussit que trop bien.

--Ah! c'est comme ça! dit-elle, eh ben! vous n'les aurez pas, pour c'que vous en dites.

--Un escalin [about 12¢], et je prends le tout, dit Placide.

En cet instant, une femme jeune encore, mais vieillie par la misère et le malheur, parut sur la galerie de la cabane: elle avait la poitrine entièrement découverte et un enfant était suspendu à son sein. La Térencine se retourna vers elle, tandis que Charlotte détournait la tête en rougissant.

--Parle donc, Maré-Jeanne! cria la virago. Est-ce qu't'as des oeufs à vendre a musié pour in escalin? où ce donc qu'vous restez, musié? j'vas vous les envoyer par l'cousin d'mon chien.

Et chacune de ces paroles était coupée par une profonde révérence.

Placide riait à se tenir les côtes.

Quequ'vous avez à terliboucher (rire) d'la sorte? s'écria-t-elle; p'tit homme manqué! avec sa mine de déterré, capable d'faire rendre l'déjeuner d'mon chat ... mais ... mais ... voyez donc comme y vous ouvre son gouffre! (sa bouche.) Allez-vous-en d'ici! vite ... vite ... ou j'vas vous tourner la tête sans d'avant derrière.

--Placide ... je vous en prie! allons-nous-en! dit Charlotte en allemand.

--Tout-à-l'heure, répondit-il dans la même langue; il n'y a rien à craindre.

Tiens! tiens! s'écria la Térencine, les v'là qui parlent latin à c't'heure ... tout comme musié le curé. Est-ce que vous dites la messe aussi, mame?

--Madame Théogene, reprit Placide, vous voulez vous battre? ... eh bien, je suis votre homme ... venez! nous serons deux à ce jeu-là. Et il retroussait ses manches.

--Placide! implora Charlotte en s'accrochant au bras de son beau-frère.

--Toi! s'écria notre poissarde, toi carcasse embeurrée! Mais, d'un tour de main, j't'e clourons l'âme entre deux pavés ... Quiens! crois-moi, cervelas de Satan, gueusard si y en a un! va-t-en! ou j'te donnerai un rayon sus l'oeil qu'tu n'en verras goutte de six semaines pour le moins ...⁸

Madame de la Houssaye wrote the preceding passage with obvious gusto. Childrens' stories she considered painfully boring to write.⁹ Notwithstanding this aversion, she was no less successful in this specialty than she was in the use of dialect. A passage from her "Mythologie des petits enfants" captures the entertaining spirit of the work. Chapter II is entitled "Olympus et Vesta." Titan emerges as what the author, herself, would probably have labeled elsewhere, "un jeune homme, pas tout-à-fait comme il faut." The portrait is, none the less, delightful to readers of all ages.

Je viens de vous dire que les premiers dieux furent le ciel et la terre. Le ciel s'appelait Olympus, la terre Vesta--ils se marièrent ensemble et eurent deux fils qu'ils nommèrent Titan et Saturne et une fille qui fut appelée Cybèle.

Il faut que vous sachiez, chers enfants, que dans tous les pays du monde où il y a des rois et des reines, c'est toujours le fils aîné qui prend la place de son

⁸De la Houssaye, Pouponne et Balthazar, pp. 52-54.

⁹Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1886.

père, c'est-à-dire qui devient roi, quand le roi son père vient à mourir. La même loi existait parmi les dieux. Les dieux ne devaient jamais mourir, mais ils pouvaient se fatiguer d'être rois et dans ce cas le fils aîné devait prendre la place de son père.

Titan était l'aîné et devait succéder à son père; mais Vesta préférait Saturne à Titan. C'était bien mal et je vais essayer de vous dire pourquoi. Titan était un géant, très laid, très commun, il parlait fort, avait des manières on ne peut plus grossières et effrayait tous ceux qui le voyaient--mais tel qu'il était, Titan avait une grande qualité; il aimait beaucoup sa mère et jamais ne lui refusait rien.

Saturne, au contraire, était un beau jeune homme aux yeux bleus, aux longs cheveux blonds; il avait une voix douce, des manières charmantes et se faisait aimer et admirer de tous ceux qui l'entouraient.¹⁰

The author's descriptions of mere mortals tended to be more precise, but she never really bothered with minutiae as some novelists have done. Her portraits seize the spirit of the man or of the group. One thinks of Stendhal rather than Balzac when comparing her style on this point. In "Les Redoutables" there is a good picture of Mikel Gordon, the son of the Irish member of the crew. Cable omitted a similar passage in "Le Voyage de ma grand'mère" when he translated it for Strange True Stories of Louisiana.¹¹ Here is her portrait of Mikel:

¹⁰Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Mythologie des petits enfants," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. III, pp. 2-3.

¹¹Many passages in "Les Redoutables" follow the other story verbatim.

Mikel avait douze ans et ne cédait à son père et à sa mère ni en laideur ni en malpropreté; ses pieds nus étaient couverts de boue, son pantalon, rapiécé en plus de vingt endroits était retenu par une seule bretelle, et sa chemise déchirée laissait à découvert une partie de son dos; ses cheveux roux, tout mêlés formaient une sorte de matelas sur la tête et ajoutait à l'impression repoussante de ses traits.¹²

Her power of synthesis is well demonstrated in "Louise," a study of the libertin in a small town. The oppressive dullness of the town on a Sunday afternoon is described in the opening paragraph. In stark contrast to this essential somnolence is the parade of Negroes endimanchés. This antithesis is effected by a judicious choice of words. "Triste" and "monotone" set the tone of the first paragraph. In the second paragraph, verbs such as "se croisent," "se carrent," "répond," "minaudant," etc. give the feeling of animation and zest. Even the nouns convey a sense of motion, e.g., "promenade" and "roulement." One can see the "volants frippés" and almost hear them, too:

Par une bleue et sauve après-diner de Mai, le village de Donaldsonville revêt ce caractère triste et monotone qui distingue toujours le dimanche dans nos petites villes américaines. Tous les magasins sont fermés; les familles se sont enfermées chez elles, ou ont été passer le saint jour à la campagne.

... les rues ne sont animées que par les nègres qui se croisent en tous sens; pour eux, le dimanche est le jour de la joie, de la promenade, aussi voyez comme ils

¹²De la Houssaye, "Les Redoutables," loc. cit., p. 4.

se carrent dans l'habit déchiré que le maître leur a abandonné; voyez la négresse au madras aux couleurs éclatantes, à la robe trop courte, garnie de volants frippés, oh! comme elle est fière d'elle-même! Comme elle répond en minaudant aux doux propos, aux roulements d'yeux de son cavalier noir aux gants de coton, au pantalon rapiécé!¹³

She was no less adept at depicting the majestic calm at sunrise on a bayou near Franklin:

C'était par une belle matinée d'avril, les premiers rayons du soleil levant semblaient se jouer dans les cimes des magnolias en fleurs, des immenses chênes qui ombragent le petit bayou Portage. ... Tout paraissait sourire: les fleurs se balançaient plus gracieusement sur leurs tiges, les arbres, recouverts de gouttes de pluie brillantes, semblaient de jeunes coquettes vêtues de robes vertes garnies de diamants; les moqueurs faisaient retentir l'air de leurs chansons matinales et le son sec du bec du piquebois était le tambourin qui accompagnait le sauve orchestre des petits musiciens ailés.¹⁴

The passage cited is constructed with an almost mathematical sense of progression, yet it is not lacking in idyllic grace. In our mind the eyes go from the stationary magnolias to the oaks where moss-draped branches have slightly more movement. Gently swaying flowers and glistening rain drops on the branches complete the visual stimuli with the image of the tree as a green-clad coquette being particularly effective.

¹³De la Houssaye, "Louise," loc. cit., p. 1.

¹⁴De la Houssaye, Charles et Ella, p. 1.

Sounds begin to enter into the composition. First, it is the mockingbird and then the whole scene seems to awaken under the insistent staccato of the woodpecker.

Would that we could attribute the exalted lyricism of "La Fauvette et le poète" to our author! The conclusion of this allegory is given, not as an original work by Mme de la Houssaye, but as a prize-winning piece by an unknown author in the Athénée Louisianais contest:

Oh! chante! chante encore! Ta voix a tant d'harmonie! elle sait si bien trouver le chemin de mon coeur! Mais où donc as-tu appris ces accords divins? quel Dieu te les a enseignés? Oh! toi qui dépeint si bien l'amour dans tes chants célestes, pourrais-tu ne pas l'éprouver? En t'écoutant, l'âme du poète devient radieuse, de triste qu'elle était, et de nouveau l'ivresse brille dans son front pâle ... oiseau charmant! Viens avec moi! il est si doux de vivre à deux! de s'aimer, de le dire! La musique et la poésie sont soeurs, unissons-les, en unissant nos destinées!

... d'un vol gracieux elle [la fauvette] descendit de l'arbre et vint doucement se poser sur l'épaule du poète.¹⁵

The other end of her range is shown in the naturalistic "Frère et soeur." Even as Madame de la Houssaye leads the reader through a succession of heinous crimes, she maintains a delicacy of expression that is admirable. This delicacy was, no doubt, based on her estimation of the tolerance of her readers. Since the novel was never published, we will never know

¹⁵De la Houssaye, "La Fauvette et le poète," loc. cit., p. 108.

if she accurately judged her readers' taste. Judging from the controversy surrounding Les Quarteronnes, which contain no passage as graphic as the one we are about to cite, we can safely assume that "Frère et soeur" would have provoked more comment. This very realistic scene, in which the brother and sister's first crime is committed, is marred by the inopportune moralizing of the author. The upward course of the action to the climax is temporarily and awkwardly suspended. The exclusion of this moralizing would add immeasurably to the climatic effect:

La jeune fille dormait, dans un désordre plein de grâce, un de ses bras rejeté en arrière soutenait sa tête charmante. Ses longs cheveux étaient dénoués et retombaient en longues mèches sur son cou d'alabâtre, sur sa poitrine découverte qu'ils voilaient à demi. Ses lèvres entr'ouvertes laissaient échapper un léger souffle, et semblaient appeler le baiser. Emmanuel releva doucement la légère moustiquaire, et resta immobile un moment devant ce spectacle ravissant, puis sa coupable ardeur, excitée par l'ivresse, se reveilla plus terrible que jamais, il osa repousser le voile qui cachait à ses yeux la gorge du marbre de l'enfant, et horreur! il y posa ses lèvres! Maria se reveilla, son premier mouvement fut de refermer vivement son vêtement de nuit, le second de presser son frère dans ses bras, en disant:--Ah! c'est toi, tu n'as pas voulu rentrer dans ta chambre sans me dire bonsoir, n'est-ce pas? --Mais au lieu de lui répondre, Emmanuel d'une de ses mains s'empara de celles de l'enfant, et l'enlaçant étroitement du bras qui lui restait libre, il la pressa avec ardeur contre sa poitrine, couvrant de baisers incestueux ces charmes divins dont la jeune fille cherchait par des efforts impuissants à lui dérober la vue: effrayée, elle voulut crier, il lui ferma la bouche sous un baiser de feu, elle se débattit encore, mais lui,

toujours plus entreprenant l'enlaçant plus étroitement, la dévorait de ses caresses ardentes, et l'enfant épuisée, haletante, vaincue dans cette lutte inégale se laissa retomber sans force dans les bras qui la retenaient toujours.

Hélas! Marguerite [sa soeur] n'était pas là! et l'ange gardien qui veillait sans cesse près de la couche virginale de cette vierge innocente, l'ange épouvanté à la vue de cette lutte incestueuse replia ses ailes et s'enfuit vers le ciel. Maria, sans secours, abandonnée, tressaillant malgré elle sous ses caresses de flamme. Maria retomba vaincue, et l'inceste fut consommé!!!¹⁶

Unfortunately the author overindulged in the practice of asides to the reader. True, the other cases are not so obtrusive, but they still must be reckoned with her stylistic deficiencies. One instance is amusing, although the writer probably did not intend it to be so. Amis et Fortune is a five hundred and fifty-eight page novel. After five hundred and twenty pages, the author had to reassure the readers:

Nos lecteurs ne commencent-ils pas à devenir impatients? ne s'imaginent-ils pas déjà que notre histoire ne finira jamais? Pour les rassurer, hâtons-nous de leur dire que nous aurons encore bien peu de choses à ajouter.¹⁷

The use of an aside in the early pages of "Claire" is questionable. This one occurs when Bernard de Sennerville is courting Clemence:

¹⁶De la Houssaye, "Frère et soeur," MA, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XIII, p. 159.

¹⁷De la Houssaye, Amis et fortune, p. 520.

Mais nous, au risque de désenchanter la lecteur, nous allons lever le voile qui couvre le coeur de la jeune fille. Non, Clémence n'était pas digne de l'amour du noble jeune homme dont tant de vertus, tant de sentiments chevalresques remplissaient l'âme. Hélas! faut-il le dire, elle n'avait aucune des qualités que lui prêtait Bernard.¹⁸

One gets the impression that the author feared that the reader would not reach this conclusion without her direction. It suggests lack of confidence in her ability.

In addition to her reliance on asides, Madame de la Houssaye used certain formulae with disconcerting frequency. One in particular betrays the speed with which she wrote: "J'avais oublié de dire ..." ¹⁹ Another is borrowed from Dumas père's Antony. Antony is pleading with Adèle to leave her husband: "... je n'aurai d'autre volonté que la tienne ..." ²⁰ She used this formula frequently, varying the subject and the possessive pronoun to suit her needs. There are at least two occurrences of it in "Frère et soeur" alone. ²¹ The worst

¹⁸De la Houssaye, "Claire," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XIV, p. 16.

¹⁹On June 26, 1887, she wrote she was about to start an Acadian novel. On July 30, 1887, she announced the completion of Pouponne et Balthazar.

²⁰Dumas père, Antony, Act V, Scene III.

²¹Vol. XII, p. 29 and Vol. XIII, p. 163.

offender is "Par un beau jour . . .," "Par une belle matinée . . .," etc. Some variation of this stock phrase is used to begin no less than four of the author's works--"Frère et soeur," "Louise," Charles et Ella, and the humorous "Souvenir de l'Exposition." One notes it elsewhere in "Georges Gérard," Gina, Dahlia, "Rose," "Claire," etc.

After discussing the relative merits and weaknesses of the author, we would logically like to speak of the influences of other writers on her. One approach would be to study her favorite authors. Happily, she was not averse to an occasional listing of "favorite" or "great" authors. Hugo and Lamartine are the French authors most frequently cited. Lamartine figures in five of the seven such lists. "A Une jeune Moldave" is the only poem mentioned by name²² and it figures twice.²³

One of the longest lists of "great" authors occurs in "L'Aveugle."²⁴ This is the story of a wealthy man who feigned

²²Madame de la Houssaye never mentioned specific works with the exception of the Lamartine poem, Dumas père's Antony, and various plays of Shakespeare.

²³In "Black Draught" (Vol. XVII, p. 33) and in "Frère et soeur" (Vol. XIV, p. 15).

²⁴Sidonie de la Houssaye, "L'Aveugle," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XXI, pp. 1-24.

blindness to observe the real character of people. A poor girl saw his advertisement for a reader and decided to apply for the position. She had to convince herself that she was qualified before she applied:

Bien certainement j'en connais quelque chose ajouta-t-elle en élevant sa petite main vers l'étagère; ne sont-ce pas là les rois de la littérature? voyons: Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Longfellow, Racine, Molière, Goethe ...²⁵

This is a typical listing; names are given without comment. One gets the impression that she is merely paying lip service to these authors. A grouping in Amis et fortune raises serious doubts about Madame de la Houssaye's literary taste. A young man is trying to convince a person with no literary appreciation that certain authors are not a waste of time. He pointed to a row of books: " ... voici sur cette table une série d'ouvrages de nos meilleurs auteurs: Mme Anaïs Ségalas, Lamartine, Cooper et autres."²⁶

Cooper is rarely considered among the giants of literature; Anaïs Ségalas (1814-1895) has long disappeared from histories of French literature. The latter was the only author our writer really spoke of at any length. This occurred shortly

²⁵Ibid., p. 2.

²⁶De la Houssaye, Amis et fortune, p. 286.

after the listing in the preceding quotation. The skeptic was not convinced. The heroine entered the conversation and asserted that Mme Ségalas' poetry must be taken as a whole--as a bouquet:

Les fleurs de poésie de Mme Ségalas sont comme de ce bouquet: ce sont des guirlandes du sentiment le plus pur et le plus gracieux. ... Ses ouvrages sont pleins de pensées plus douces, plus gracieuses, les unes que les autres ... Elle est orateur et musicien à la fois.²⁷

Our author never discussed any writer in more detail than this. Another indication of her limited interests occurs in "L'Aveugle." The heroine was asked to read from her favorite work for the "blind" man. The author's apparently instinctive choice was Byron's "Le Corsaire," a conventional idealization of the romantic hero. After reflecting, she lined through this title and wrote above it Othello, a choice she deemed more acceptable to the public of the 1880's.

There is no question of any of the above authors exerting an influence on Mme de la Houssaye. On the other hand, Dumas père, cited at least three times in her correspondence,²⁸

²⁷Ibid., p. 288.

²⁸Mme de la Houssaye mentioned his reliance on associates to aid him in his prodigious output. She never mentioned individual works, style, or her obvious debt to the author. Vide letters dated: January 18, 1884; September 17, 1884, and July 30, 1887.

exerted some influence. In the chapters on Les Quarteronnes, we noted the borrowings from his plots. In this chapter we noted the borrowing of a phrase that she changed to suit her needs. It is not certain that her abuse of history comes from Dumas père; she could have acquired her distorted perspective in the St. Martinville area.

Several devices she used are found in the translated works of May Agnes Fleming (1840-1880), who has passed into even greater obscurity than Anaïs Ségalas. Mrs. Fleming mentioned the pernicious influence of George Sand and Dumas in Sybille that our author translated as Le Mari de Marguerite.²⁹ The downfall of Emmanuel and Maria in "Frère et soeur" started with their reading of these two writers.³⁰ Mme de la Houssaye's asides on the impossibility of foreseeing the consequences of rash actions also have a precedent in the work of May Agnes Fleming. In Le Mari de Marguerite the indulgent grandfather too readily gave in to Marguerite's wish to visit Boston:

Et c'est ainsi que fut accordé ce consentement qui devait changer toute la vie de Sybille; oh! si cet

²⁹De la Houssaye, Le Mari de Marguerite, p. 13.

³⁰De la Houssaye, "Frère et soeur," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XIII, p. 139.

aïeul si aimant, si dévoué avait pu, un seul instant lever le voile de l'avenir, comme il aurait refusé cette promesse qu'il avait faite si facilement.³¹

In the same novel there is a description of Marguerite that undoubtedly influenced the rather conventional portraits of the quadroons:

Elle était belle d'une beauté enchanteresse ... Elle dansa, elle chanta, elle fit enfin tout ce que les petites coquettes de son âge font dans un bal, et ceci avec une grâce, un charme, une aisance sans pareille.³²

On the whole, however, we would have to conclude that her style is essentially original. Her faults are generally the result of having to write too hurriedly. They would not really disturb the reader of an isolated work. It is only when viewed in the total production that they form an objectionable pattern. There are good points that whet our appetites for more, but there is no more. Humor is the one that comes readily to mind. A passage in Pouponne et Balthazar has been already cited. She was proud of a humorous sketch she did in English.³³ Unfortunately this story now exists only in French under the title, "Souvenir de

³¹De la Houssaye, Le Mari de Marguerite, p. 24.

³²Ibid., p. 46.

³³Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, August 2, 1887.

l'Exposition de 1885."³⁴ It tells of the visit of a backwoodsman's wife and son to the exhibition in New Orleans. Their gaucherie is perfectly captured, but their language was English and not the Acadian French of the only extant version. We can assume only that their English was as vigorous as the Acadian dialect she had them speak.

How could we characterize Mme de la Houssaye's style? Wherein lies her creativity? No answer could omit her range and versaility. She was a master of conventional Romanticism. She demonstrated this talent in both novels and short stories. Her facility was no less evident in childrens' stories. Tales of mystery and suspense were not foreign to her. Late in life, she essayed, with some success, the naturalistic novel. Finally, she was no less at home in the Acadian and Negro dialects than she was in standard French.

³⁴Sidonie de la Houssaye, "Souvenir de l'Exposition de 1885," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. VII, pp. 185-99.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

As we noted in the introduction, critics have pointed to the need of a more thorough study of the life and writings of Mme Sidonie de la Houssaye. This work was undertaken to satisfy that need.

The facts of her life were quickly enshrouded in a legend that she, herself, helped to perpetuate in her fiction and in the soi-disant autobiography, "Une Page de ma vie." Her knowledge of her own family was far from complete. Numerous instances of her cavalier treatment of history, both local and French, have been cited. Her grandchildren, who knew nothing of her early life and of her husband,¹ were the primary sources for the writers such as Caufeild and Tinker, who attempted to establish biographies some thirty-five years after the author's death. Time had blurred their recollections. What was not blurred was idealized. In the information they

¹Her oldest grandchild was less than three years old when her husband was killed.

gave to the earlier writers, there is no hint that Madame de la Houssaye was a very controversial figure in her own town of Franklin. Pride and a natural reticence, no doubt, caused them to omit any mention of the terrible financial struggle that was hers, especially after the Civil War. Finally, it should be noted that they knew very little of the author's business dealings. She frequently mentioned to Cable things that she did not want her "children" to know. Obviously, they had no idea of the contents of her letters to him.

Her relationship with Cable is a classic example of the legend that surrounds her name. It is hoped that the truth here revealed about it will prove acceptable after so many years. One thing is certain; Cable never stole any of her material. If anything, he influenced her own writing. After all, Old Creole Days and The Grandissimes were written three to four years before she had anything published. Cable's fault was not theft, but abuse of friendship. His critics should find new insight into his character in the detailed study of his dealings with a lesser author.

The extensive use of her correspondence and of the civil records of two Louisiana parishes has, we trust, furnished a significant amount of information whose existence was apparently not previously suspected.

The portrait that emerges is far more interesting than that of the doting grandmother, who delighted in writing stories for her "children." She was, in truth, a doting and even an overly possessive grandparent. Paradoxically, however, she detested the "babies' tales" she wrote so well.² She was also a snob who tried to teach her grandchildren racial tolerance.³ Her preoccupation with titles and aristocracy was almost ludicrous; in her business dealings she would have shamed one of Maupassant's Norman peasants. Her correspondence with Cable shows how rusée and finaude she really was.

Sidonie de la Houssaye, the writer, should emerge with a better image after this comprehensive study of her works. With the exception of Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, her published works all ended on the note of "and they lived happily ever after." "Claire," which she once described as "my pet work," ends on a tragic note. What would her readers have thought of it and of the even more daring "Frere et soeur" had they had the opportunity to read them?

This writer suggests no drastic change in the general

²Letter from Sidonie de la Houssaye, September 2, 1886.

³Vide "Les Petits soldats," MS, de la Houssaye Collection, loc. cit., Vol. XXI.

classification accorded her by former commentators. Miss Savoie called her a Romantic in 1936.⁴ There is no reason to disagree thirty years later. In what other category could an author whose works abound in sort, fatalite, destinée, parias, and maudits, possibly be placed? The fact that Lamartine was her favorite poet and Antony her favorite play would seem to clinch the argument.

We must add, however, that she longed to expand her horizons and even to embrace realism and naturalism. Such works as Les Quarteronnes, "Claire," and "Frère et soeur" clearly indicate the new field she hoped to enter. The attempt was not an unqualified success, however. She conceived realistic plots and then used Romanticism as her vehicle. At the age of sixty-five she simply could not isolate herself from her whole life. Had she started writing earlier, perhaps she could have stifled the inner voices in the manner of a Stendhal or a Flaubert.

Her achievements are, none the less, considerable. She was successful as a feuilletoniste. Her childrens' stories are entertaining and pleasantly didactic. The "Mythologie des petits enfants" must be counted among her

⁴Savoie, op. cit., p. 48.

better works. It deserves publication--in the original or in translation.

In the area of the roman de mœurs she was a good practitioner. Exception must be taken to her own evaluation of Les Quarteronnes, however. This series represents an unfortunate attempt to enter an area for which she was patently unprepared. Virtually any other work of hers,⁵ with the exception of those sold to Cable and the related works, i.e., "Les Redoutables" and "Georges Gérard," are accurate in the depiction of the mœurs she describes. Certainly, she knew Louisiana plantation life and the Acadians.

Pouponne et Balthazar would have to be placed very high on the list of her compositions. One cannot imagine a more vigorous and sympathetic treatment of the Acadians.⁶ It is regrettable that she did not exploit her apparent facility in humor and Acadian dialect in other stories.

Sidonie de la Houssaye must be ranked among the best of Louisiana French writers. Few authors in any literature have embraced so wide a range. Who can say what she might

⁵The patent medicine stories, of course, cannot be seriously considered for literary or historical value.

⁶This short nouvelle acadienne stands in sharp contrast to the sirupy "true stories" of the Acadians that do no honor to literature or history.

have accomplished had she begun writing earlier and under more favorable circumstances? She would almost certainly have produced more and better literary compositions, but in all probability she would not, under such circumstances, have lived a life more fascinating than any novel. Be that as it may, it is sincerely hoped that the present study will have succeeded in capturing the indomitable spirit of a remarkable woman.

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APPENDIX A

Contents of the de la Houssaye Collection at the Louisiana State University Library. (The works are listed by category in the order of their appearance in the Collection. The order is not chronological.)

Novels:	MS pages
Georges Gérard, IV (Unfinished.)	127
<u>Octavia la quarteronne</u> , VI	84
<u>Violetta la quarteronne</u> , VII	184
<u>Gina la quarteronne</u> , VII, VIII, and IX	655
<u>Dahlia la quarteronne</u> , IX and X	608
Frère et sœur, XII, XIII, and XIV	425
Claire, XIV and XV	390
<u>Pouponne et Balthazar</u> , XVII	131
Les Redoutables, XIX (Unfinished.)	104
Un Roman à Franklin (<u>Charles et Ella</u>), XX	76
Short Stories:	
Le Fort de Keronec, II	13
Une Paire de gants, II	7
Rose Blanche, II	25
Souvenir d'un sofa, V	72

Short Stories (Cont.):	MS pages
Le Doigt de Dieu, XI	61
Sahretta la danseuse, XI	51
Un Divorce, XII	12
L'Oeuvre d'une jeune fille, XVI	163
Louise, XVI	52
Mardi Gras, XVIII	39
Translations:	
L'Etoile d'argent by May Carleton [May Agnes Fleming], I	337
L'Enfant des prairies, V	104
Simple Histoire by Virginia de Forrest, XVIII	14
Le Portrait by N. Victor, XVIII	25
La Mariole, "d'une gazette de Chicago, le 6 janvier, 1864," XVIII	15
Une Histoire de revenant by Margaret Blount [Mrs. Mary O'Francis], XVIII	49
Sybille by May Agnes Fleming, XIX (Sold under the title of <u>Le Mari de Marguerite</u> as an original work to <u>L'Abeille</u> in New Orleans.)	150
Traduction de Schiller, XX (Actually an adaptation of a French translation of Act I of <u>Don Carlos</u> .)	25
Un Revenant, XXI (A childrens' story.)	3

Translations (Cont.):	MS pages
Le Petit héros Congo, XXI (A childrens' story.)	3
Une Boucle de cheveux, XXI (Unfinished. A childrens' story.)	5
Patent Medicine Stories:	
Rough on Pain, VI	33
Chattanooga, VI	175
Black Draught, XVII	65
(), XVII (The purchaser was to insert the name of his product.)	45
Rose ou le malade inattendu, XVII	131
Childrens' Stories:	
Une Poupée d'autrefois, II	16
Les Petits vagabonds, II	62
Mythologie des petits enfants, III	128
L'Enfant perdue, XX	14
La Maison de poupées, XXI	82
Les Petits soldats, XXI	17
Un Jour de pluie, XXI	6
Tenez vos yeux ouverts, XXI	5
L'Aveugle, XXI	24
L'Echange, XXI	5

Childrens' Stories (Cont.):	MS pages
Le Bonhomme Pistache, XXI	10
Negro Patois Songs <u>Collected</u> by Mme de la Houssaye	
Pou fait dromi (Pour faire dormir.), VII	2
In grand bataille (Une grande bataille.), VII	1
Mo ti choual (Mon petit cheval.), VII	1
Miscellaneous:	
Les Fleurs et bijoux de la grand'mère, II	6
Une Mère (A play.), V	94
Souvenir du 18 octobre 1838, V	2
La Mère et le lys (An allegory.), V	2
Discours prononcé par un jeune homme, contre deux jeunes gens qui soutenaient que l'infidélité ajoutait au bonheur, V	2
<u>La Fauvette et le poète</u> (An allegory.), V	5
<u>L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours</u> (An idyll.), V	4
Une Histoire d'amour qui commence comme un conte de fées, V	2
Calembourg monstre, V	5
Souvenir de l'Exposition de 1885, VII	15
Extraits des lettres d'un médecin, XI and XII	94

Miscellaneous (Cont.):

MS pages

Une Page de ma vie, XVIII (Fragment.) 1

Ecrit pour le Moniteur de Franklin, XVIII 11

Total MS pages: 5074.

APPENDIX B

Novels

De la Houssaye, Sidonie. Amis et fortune. Bonnet Carré,
La.: Imprimerie du Meschacébé, 1893.

_____. Charles et Ella. Bonnet Carré, La.: Imprimerie
du Meschacébé, 1892.

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Partie: Violetta la Quarteronne. Bonnet Carré, La.:
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Serialized Novels

De la Houssaye, Sidonie. "Le Mari de Marguerite," L'Abeille
(New Orleans) (August 26, 1883-December 16, 1883).

_____. "La Dame au masque noir," Le Franco-Louisianais
(New Orleans) (3rd installment running on May 14,
1887).

_____. "Charles et Ella," Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré,
La.) (October 24, 1891-January 9, 1892).

_____. "Amis et fortune," Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré,
La.) (7th installment running on August 6, 1892).

Raymond, Louise [de la Houssaye, Sidonie]. "Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Deuxième Partie: Violette la Quarteronne," Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré, La.) (6th installment running on September 22, 1894).

_____. "Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Troisième Partie: Gina la Quarteronne," Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré, La.) (February 2, 1895-1897(?)).

_____. "Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Quatrième Partie: Dahlia la Quarteronne," Le Meschacébé (Bonnet Carré, La.) (May-June, 1897(?)-July 30, 1898).

Prize-winning allegory and idyll in the 1889
contest of L'Athénée Louisianais

De la Houssaye, Sidonie. "La Fauvette et le poète," Comptes Rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais, Livraison 3^e, 4^e série, tome 1 (May, 1890), 104-08.

_____. "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours," Comptes Rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais, Livraison 3^e, 4^e série, tome 1 (May, 1890), 108-12.

Prize-winning short story submitted in the name
of Mme de la Houssaye's granddaughter in the
1890 contest of L'Athénée Louisianais

Tarlton, Gabrielle. "Rose Blanche," Comptes Rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais, Livraison 3^e, 4^e série, tome 2 (May, 1891), 301-25. (The manuscript of this story is in the de la Houssaye Collection. It is in Mme de la Houssaye's handwriting. For this and other reasons cited in her biography, we attribute this work to Mme de la Houssaye.)

APPENDIX C

Clay, Bertha M. [Charlotte M. Brame]. Beyond Pardon. Translated by Sidonie de la Houssaye. New York: G. Munro, 1884. This translation was mentioned in a March 29, 1887 letter to Cable. The MS is lost.

De la Houssaye, Sidonie. "L'Arche de Noé," was mentioned in an April 9, 1888 letter to Cable. The title refers to the name of a plantation. The work was reputedly sold to Le Petit Courrier des Dames in Paris. No other information is available.

_____. "La Dame au masque noir," began en feuilleton in Le Franco-Louisianais (New Orleans) on April 9, 1887. Only the May 14, 1887 installment is extant.

_____. "Don Ramon de Mendez," was never mentioned by the author. Tinker cited it as a patent medicine story. Vide Les Ecrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIX^e siècle, p. 113.

_____. "Les Invincibles," was cited by Savoie, op. cit., p. 188. The MS was said to be lost. The title appears to be a variation of "Les Redoutables."

_____. "Une Page de ma vie," was translated by Mrs. Emma Tarlton Stafford, the author's granddaughter. The original version was removed from the MS collection. This may have occurred in January, 1935, when Mrs. Stafford expressed a desire to show this and other works to Dr. Rudolph Matas (1860-1957), the celebrated surgeon and littérateur. There is no record of any meeting.

_____. "Souvenirs de France et d'Amérique," is cited in the brief, but inaccurate biographical sketch in Vol. XV of Library of Southern Literature. The attribution of this work to our author appears to be an editorial error.

De la Houssaye, Sidonie. "Uhlán," was mentioned only in a December 18, 1892 letter from Charles Lasseigne, Mme de la Houssaye's publisher. Miss Savoie incorrectly included it among the quadroon stories. Savoie, op. cit., p. 85. Nothing else is known of the work.

VITA

Joseph John Perret was born in 1932 in New Orleans. A graduate of Jesuit High School, he received his B.A. in French from Tulane University in 1952. He enlisted in the Army and served until 1954 when he began graduate studies at Tulane University. The academic year 1955-56 was spent in Paris where he received a certificate from the Institut de Phonétique. After receiving his M.A.T. in French from Tulane University in 1958, he taught in the public and parochial high schools of New Orleans for two years. He resumed his graduate studies in 1960 at Louisiana State University where he won a Gottlieb Scholarship in 1961. From 1962 until 1965, he served as Assistant Professor of Foreign Languages at Lamar State College of Technology in Beaumont, Texas. He is married to the former Mary Fisk. At present he is a doctoral candidate for the May, 1966 graduation.

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Joseph John Perret

Major Field: French

Title of Thesis: A Critical Study of the Life and Writings of Sidonie de la Houssaye
with special emphasis on the unpublished works.

Approved:

Elliott D. Healy
Major Professor and Chairman

Max Goodrich
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

George Ross Ridge

Frederick Kellerman

Henry Lavin

A. Thompson

Selma G. Johnson

Date of Examination:

April 18, 1966